

# **ALASKA VETERANS NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

Prepared by:  
Mouhcine Guettabi  
Rosyland Frazier

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Alaska Office of Veterans Affairs

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Institute of Social and Economic Research  
University of Alaska Anchorage  
3211 Providence Drive  
Anchorage, Alaska 99508

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For more information please contact: Mouhcine Guettabi, Assistant Professor Economics, email: [mguettabi@alaska.edu](mailto:mguettabi@alaska.edu), phone: 907-786-5496 or Rosyland Frazier, Senior Research Professional, email: [rrfrazier@alaska.edu](mailto:rrfrazier@alaska.edu), phone: 907-786-5432

## Table of Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	1
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	3
Who is a veteran?	3
What are the eligibility criteria?	3
Federal veteran benefits and State veteran benefits	3
What are the basic eligibility criteria for federal (VA) administered veteran benefits?	3
Alaska Veterans Needs Assessment	8
What are the goals?	8
What are the research questions?	8
What we did to develop the veterans needs assessment?	8
<b>CHARACTERISTICS OF ALASKA VETERANS AND OUR SURVEY RESPONDENTS</b>	9
Introduction	9
Results	9
<b>WHAT ARE THE MOST CRITICAL NEEDS FOR ALASKA VETERANS?</b>	16
Introduction	16
Results	16
<b>WHAT DO VETERANS KNOW ABOUT BENEFITS - FEDERAL AND STATE?</b>	22
Introduction	22
Results	23
How veterans learn about benefits	23
Why veterans do not use their benefits	24
How many veterans have claimed or received benefits	24
Federal veteran benefits	25
Alaska State veteran benefits	27
Eligibility and claim submission	30
<b>HOW ARE VETERANS USING THEIR BENEFITS?</b>	31
<b>HEALTH SERVICES</b>	31
Introduction	31
Results	32
<b>DISABILITY COMPENSATION</b>	39
Introduction	39
Results	39
<b>EMPLOYMENT</b>	44
Introduction	44
Results	45

<b>EDUCATION AND TRAINING</b>	52
Introduction	52
Results	52
<b>HOUSING</b>	55
Introduction	55
Results	56
<b>WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS DO VETERANS HAVE FOR IMPROVING BENEFITS?</b>	60
<b>WHAT ARE OUR CONCLUSIONS?</b>	61

## TABLES

### Characteristics of Alaska Veterans and Our Survey Respondents

Table 1. Comparison of Alaska veterans and survey respondents	10
Table 2. Number and percent of respondents by age group and gender	10
Table 3. Number and percent of respondents by highest level of education completed	11
Table 4. Number and percent of respondents by gender and highest level of education completed	12
Table 5. Number and percent of respondents by total annual income all sources	13
Table 6. Percent of respondents by branch of service (mutually exclusive categories)	14
Table 7. Percent of respondents by time of service	15
Table 8. Were you deployed to a war zone during your active duty?	15

### Critical Needs

Table 9. Three most important needs of veterans by percent of respondents	16
Table 10. Summary of three most critical needs by respondent age group	17
Table 11. Most important need of veterans by respondent age group	18
Table 12. Most important need of veterans by gender of respondent	18
Table 13. Second most important need of veterans by respondent age group	19
Table 14. Second most important need of veterans by gender of respondent	19
Table 15. Third most important need of veterans by respondent age group	20
Table 16. Third most important need of veterans by gender of respondent	20
Table 17. Third most important need of veterans by number of female respondents	21

### Knowledge of Benefits

Table 18. Are you receiving, or have you ever claimed or received VA benefits by gender of respondent?	25
Table 19. Percent of respondents by knowledge of federal benefits	25
Table 20. Percent of respondents claiming the most frequently claimed federal benefits by age groups	27
Table 21. Percent of respondents by knowledge of Alaska state benefits	28
Table 22. Percent of respondents claiming the most frequently claimed state benefits by age group	30

## Health Services

Table 23. Percent of respondents who have applied for VA health care benefit _____	33
Table 24. Percent of respondents by age group who have ever applied for VA health care services by age group _____	33
Table 25. Percent of respondents by disability rating who used any VA health care services or had any health care paid for by the VA in the last six months _____	34
Table 26. Percent of respondents who have used VA health care in the last six months by financial support for that care _____	35
Table 27. Percent of respondents by disability rating who have used VA health care in the last six months by payer source for that care? _____	36
Table 28. Percent of respondents by the primary way veterans plan to use VA in the future _____	36
Table 29. Percent of women respondents who have used women's healthcare services during the past 12 months _____	37
Table 30. Percent of women veterans by any location where women's health care services were obtained during the past 12 months _____	38

## Disability Compensation

Table 31. Have you ever applied for VA disability compensation benefits by gender of respondent? _____	40
Table 32. Percent of respondents across disability ratings conditional on receiving VA benefits _____	40
Table 33. Percent of respondents receiving monthly disability benefits (among those who have claimed VA benefits) _____	41
Table 34. Percent of respondents receiving monthly disability payments by disability rating _____	41
Table 35. Importance of disability payment benefit to help meet financial needs _____	41
Table 36. Importance of disability payments by respondent disability rating _____	42

## Employment

Table 37. Employment status during last week by percent of respondents _____	45
Table 38. Among those not employed, reasons for not looking for work _____	46
Table 39. Services that assisted you in obtaining a job _____	47
Table 40. Percent of respondents by how well prepared to enter the civilian job market (labor force) _____	48
Table 41. Preparedness for the labor force by age _____	49
Table 42. Percent of respondents whose military training matched and most recent job _____	50
Table 43. Percent of respondents by reason most recent civilian job doesn't match occupation trained for in the military _____	50
Table 44. Percent of respondents who thought the training, skills or experiences you gained in the military apply to their recent civilian job _____	50
Table 45. Percent of respondents that received training or education and entered a new career or line of work _____	51

## **Education and Training**

Table 46. Use of any VA education or training benefits by age group _____	53
Table 47. Use of education benefits by gender and age group _____	54
Table 48. Percent of respondents by time of use of education benefits _____	54
Table 49. Importance of VA education benefits in helping veterans meet you educational or employment goals _____	54

## **Housing**

Table 50. Where would you most likely expect to go to access long term care services if you couldn't care for yourself at home? _____	56
Table 51. Percent of respondents by importance of proximity _____	57
Table 52. Maximum time travel a person is willing to travel to where you would stay ____	58
Table 53. Percent of respondents by region or community expect to go for long-term care _____	58
Table 54. Reason for selecting the preferred location _____	58
Table 55. Facility preference by service to only veterans or veteran and non-veterans ____	59

## **FIGURES**

### **Characteristics of Alaska Veterans and Our Survey Respondents**

Figure 1. Number of respondents by age groups and gender _____	11
Figure 2. Highest level of education completed by gender of the respondent _____	12
Figure 3. Percent of respondents by total annual income _____	13
Figure 4. Percent of respondents by branch of service (mutually exclusive categories) ____	14
Figure 5. Percent of respondents by time of service _____	15

### **Critical Needs**

Figure 6. Three most critical needs of veterans by percent of respondents _____	17
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### **Knowledge of Benefits**

Figure 7. Percent of respondents by knowledge of federal benefits _____	26
Figure 8. Percent of respondents by knowledge of state benefits _____	29

### **Health Services**

Figure 9. Percent of respondents by age group who have ever applied for VA health care services _____	33
Figure 10. Percent of respondents by disability rating who used any VA health care services or had any health care paid for by the VA in the last six months _____	34
Figure 11. Percent of respondents who have used VA health care in the last six months by source or sources of financial support for that care _____	35
Figure 12. What is the primary way you plan to use VA health care in the future? ____	37

## **Disability Compensation**

Figure 13. Importance of disability payments by age group _____	43
---	----

## **Employment**

Figure 14. Employment status during last week by percent of respondents _____	45
Figure 15. Among those not employed, reasons for not looking for work _____	46
Figure 16. What services assisted you in finding a job? _____	47
Figure 17. Preparedness for the labor force by age _____	49

## **Education and Training**

Figure 18. Have you used any VA education or training benefits? _____	53
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## **Housing**

Figure 19. Importance of proximity and other attributes _____	57
Figure 20. Facility type preference _____	59

## **APPENDICES**

### **Methodology and Procedures for Focus Groups**

- Consent Forms
- Discussion Guide
- Recruitment Flyer

### **Methodology and Procedures for Statewide Survey**

- Cover Letter
- Questionnaire

### **Methodology and Procedures for Key Informant Interviews**

## **Executive Summary**

The Institute of Social of Economic Research conducted a needs assessment of Alaska Veterans starting in the spring of 2014. Our goal was to identify and measure areas for improvement in providing services and determining the methods to achieve improvement. Our approach consisted of three methods:

- Survey of Alaska veterans using a list of 2,950 veterans who have requested veteran designation on their driver's license.
- Focus groups: one consisting of women and one of disabled veterans.
- Key informant interviews with individuals responsible for helping veterans navigate the benefits available to them.

Our findings are far ranging and details can be found in the report below. One of the most important lessons was the difference in needs across age groups. Younger veterans were concerned about education and employment while their older counterparts valued health care and navigating the application process. Consistent with these differences, the focus groups made it clear that targeted reminders that take into account the veteran's life stage may be more effective. As things stand, the amount of information one is exposed to at separation can be overwhelming and intimidating.

Awareness and use of federal benefits was high for health care, housing, and education benefits. Employment services were less utilized but most of our respondents were aware of their existence (Table 19). Across the board, lack of knowledge/awareness of specific benefits does not seem to be systemic. The three most claimed benefits were Health Care, Disability Compensation, Home Loans, and Education and Training.

At the state level, the most commonly claimed benefits by the survey respondents are the veteran driver's license, veterans license plates, hunting and fishing licenses, property exemption, education benefits, and veterans housing and residential loans. Of note is that only 9% claimed Veteran employment services and awareness about state benefits seems to be more of an issue than in the federal case.

A third of our respondents had a disability rating of 50% or higher. Disability payments are very important across the board but seem to be essential for veterans with higher disability ratings. These payments were also more important to younger veterans who potentially have had less time to accumulate savings over their lifetime.

Health care use is very much associated with age as older respondents were more likely to have applied for Health Care Services. Additionally, disability rating is also associated with frequency of health care use and utilization of VA services. Thirty percent of our respondents think they will use VA as their primary source of healthcare.

Younger veterans are considerably more likely to use education benefits. The majority of our respondents used education benefits after active duty. However, more than ten percent have used education benefits both before and after and another seven percent used them only during active service.

When asked about living arrangements in case a veteran could not care for themselves, it was clear that proximity to friends and family was paramount. Anchorage was chosen as the location most of them would prefer.



## INTRODUCTION

Alaska veterans are eligible for benefits administered through the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Alaska Department of Military and Veteran Affairs, Office of Veterans Affairs (OVA). The Alaska Office of Veterans Affairs provides support to the state's 77,866 veterans, 27,000 active duty and National Guard/Reserve members and 126,000 dependents. According to the 5 year estimate (2009-2013) from the American Community Survey, there are 71,004 veterans in Alaska. Approximately 31,000 Alaskan veterans are currently enrolled in the VA medical program. In 2012, approximately 214 million federal dollars were provided directly to veterans residing in Alaska as disability compensation. Out of the 31,000 veterans currently enrolled in the VA medical system, the federal VA treats 16,336 patients annually with managed care that costs nearly \$153 million per year.<sup>1</sup>

### Who is a veteran?

#### What are the eligibility criteria?

The basic eligibility criteria for determining who is a veteran is described in a February 2015 report by the Congressional Research Service prepared for members and committees of Congress.<sup>2</sup> Eligibility requirements for those who are not current service members is defined as

“...the claimant must be a veteran or, in some circumstances, the survivor or the dependent of a veteran. By statute, a *veteran* is defined as a “person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable.”<sup>3</sup>

To determine eligibility as a veteran for veteran benefits the VA relies on military service records. “Veterans ... [must submit a copy] of their service discharge form (DD 214, DD215 or for World War II Veterans, a WD.”<sup>4</sup> These forms document the length and time of service; type of discharge, or provide the full name, military service number, character of service, and dates of service.

### Federal veteran benefits and State veteran benefits

#### What are the basic eligibility criteria for federal (VA) administered veteran benefits?

Once the claimant proves they are an eligible veteran relating to the general qualification for veteran benefits, the second step is for the veteran to prove they are entitled to the particular

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<sup>1</sup> 2012 Annual Report, Alaska Department of Military & Veterans Affairs:

[http://dmva.alaska.gov/content/annual%20reports/2012DMVAAAnnualReport\\_web.pdf](http://dmva.alaska.gov/content/annual%20reports/2012DMVAAAnnualReport_web.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Moulta-Ali, Umar, Who is a “Veteran”? – Basic Eligibility for Veterans’ Benefits, Congressional Research Service, February 13, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Moulta-Ali, Umar, Who is a “Veteran”? – Basic Eligibility for Veterans’ Benefits, Congressional Research Service, February 13, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Alaska Department of Veteran Affairs, Office of Veterans Affairs, Eligibility  
<http://veterans.alaska.gov/eligibility.html> accessed April 14, 2015

benefit they are seeking.<sup>5</sup> Both the federal and state benefits offer a broad range of benefits and services for eligible veterans. The VA provides federal benefits for veterans of the United States armed forces and individual states provide state specific benefits for veterans who are eligible for benefits and services. Some of these complement each other and others are provided by one or the other. Here are the basic VA eligibility criteria for health services and disability compensation and the associated federal and state benefits.

Health Care Services					
Basic Eligibility Criteria as set by VA <sup>6</sup>				Federal Benefits	State Benefits
Active Service Criteria for Veteran Status Minimum Service Requirement	Length of Service Criteria - Veteran Status - Period of Service	Discharge Criteria for Veteran Status	Whether the Military Service Was During a Time of War - Certain VA benefits require wartime service		
<b>Basic Eligibility</b> If you served in the active military service and were separated under any condition other than dishonorable, you may qualify for VA health care benefits. Current and former members of the Reserves or National Guard who were called to active duty by a federal order and completed the full period for which they were called or ordered to active duty may be eligible for VA health benefits as well.	<b>Minimum Duty Requirements</b> Most Veterans who enlisted after September 7, 1980, or entered active duty after October 16, 1981, must have served 24 continuous months or the full period for which they were called to active duty in order to be eligible. This minimum duty requirement may not apply to Veterans who were discharged for a disability incurred or aggravated in the line of duty, for a hardship or "early out," or those who served prior to September 7, 1980. Since there are a number of other exceptions to the minimum	<b>Veterans Eligibility</b> For the purposes of VA health benefits and services, a person who served in the active military service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable is a Veteran.	<b>Enhanced Eligibility</b> Certain Veterans may be afforded enhanced eligibility status when applying and enrolling in the VA health care system. Veterans who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are a Former <b>Prisoner of War (POW)</b></li> <li>• In receipt of the Purple Heart Medal.</li> <li>• In receipt of the Medal of Honor.</li> <li>• Have a compensable VA awarded service-connected disability of 10% or more.</li> <li>• In receipt of a VA Pension.</li> <li>• Were discharged from the military because of a disability (not preexisting), early out, or hardship.</li> <li>• Served in a Theater of Operations for 5</li> </ul>	VA Health Services VA operates the nation's largest integrated health care system with more than 1,500 sites of care, including hospitals, community clinics, and community living centers, domiciliary, readjustment counseling centers, and various other facilities.	Health services not included in Alaska veteran benefits.

<sup>5</sup> Alaska Department of Veteran Affairs, Office of Veterans Affairs, Eligibility <http://veterans.alaska.gov/eligibility.html> accessed April 14, 2015

<sup>6</sup> US Department of Veterans Affairs, Health Benefits at <http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/apply/veterans.asp>, accessed on June 10, 2015

Health Care Services					
Basic Eligibility Criteria as set by VA <sup>6</sup>				Federal Benefits	State Benefits
Active Service Criteria for Veteran Status Minimum Service Requirement	Length of Service Criteria Veteran Status - Period of Service	Discharge Criteria for Veteran Status	Whether the Military Service Was During a Time of War - Certain VA benefits require wartime service		
	duty requirements, VA encourages all Veterans to apply so that we may determine their enrollment eligibility.		<p>years post discharge.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Served in the Republic of Vietnam from January 9, 1962 to May 7, 1975. <a href="#">U.S. Navy and Coast Guard ships associated with military service in Vietnam</a></li> <li>Served in the Persian Gulf from August 2, 1990 to November 11, 1998.</li> <li>Were stationed or resided at Camp Lejeune for 30 days or more between August 1, 1953 and December 31, 1987.</li> <li>Are found by VA to be Catastrophically Disabled.</li> <li>Previous years' household income is below VA's National Income or Geographical-Adjusted Thresholds.</li> </ul>		

<b>Disability Compensation<sup>7</sup></b> <b>Disability Compensation</b> is a tax free monetary benefit paid to Veterans with disabilities that are the result of a disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active military service. Compensation may also be paid for post-service disabilities that are considered related or secondary to disabilities occurring in service and for disabilities presumed to be related to circumstances of military service, even though they may arise after service. Generally, the degrees of disability specified are also designed to compensate for considerable loss of working time from exacerbations or illnesses.					
Basic Eligibility Criteria as set by VA					
Active Service Criteria for Veteran Status Minimum Service Requirement	Length of Service Criteria Veteran Status - Period of Service	Discharge Criteria for Veteran Status	Whether the Military Service Was During a Time of War - Certain VA benefits require wartime service		
<b>Eligibility Requirements</b> Compensation benefits require that your disability be service-connected.	Any	You must also have separated or been discharged from service under other than dishonorable conditions.	Not Applicable	<b>Types of Compensation</b> VA disability compensation provides monthly benefits to Veterans in recognition of the effects of disabilities, diseases, or injuries incurred or aggravated during active military service. The program also provides monthly payments to surviving spouses, dependent children, and dependent parents in recognition of the economic loss caused by a Veteran's death during military service or, after discharge from military service, as a result of a service-connected disability. A summary of VA's disability compensation programs is below. <b>Disability Compensation</b> A tax-free monetary benefit paid to Veterans with disabilities that are the result of a disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active military service. The benefit amount is graduated according to the degree of the Veteran's disability on a scale from 10 percent to 100 percent (in increments of 10 percent). Compensation may also be paid for disabilities that are considered related or secondary to disabilities occurring in service and for disabilities presumed to be related to circumstances of military service, even though they may arise after service. Generally, the degrees of disability specified are also designed to	Disability compensation not included in Alaska veteran benefits

<sup>7</sup> US Department of Veteran Affairs, Compensation at <http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/> accessed on June 10, 2015

<b>Disability Compensation<sup>7</sup></b> <b>Disability Compensation</b> is a tax free monetary benefit paid to Veterans with disabilities that are the result of a disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active military service. Compensation may also be paid for post-service disabilities that are considered related or secondary to disabilities occurring in service and for disabilities presumed to be related to circumstances of military service, even though they may arise after service. Generally, the degrees of disability specified are also designed to compensate for considerable loss of working time from exacerbations or illnesses.					
Basic Eligibility Criteria as set by VA					
Active Service Criteria for Veteran Status Minimum Service Requirement	Length of Service Criteria Veteran Status - Period of Service	Discharge Criteria for Veteran Status	Whether the Military Service Was During a Time of War - Certain VA benefits require wartime service		
				compensate for considerable loss of working time from exacerbations or illnesses.  Other programs include:  Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC)  Special Monthly Compensation (SMC)  Claims Based on Special Circumstances	
<a href="#">Eligibility Requirements</a> Compensation benefits require that your disability be service-connected.	Any	You must also have separated or been discharged from service under other than dishonorable conditions.	Not Applicable	Disabled Veterans Parking Permits not included in Federal veteran benefits	<b>Disabled Veterans Parking Permits</b> Disabled Parking Permits are also obtained from the DMV, available to persons at least 50 % disabled or medically handicapped, including persons disabled in the line of duty while serving in the Alaska Territorial Guard.
<a href="#">Eligibility Requirements</a> Compensation benefits require that your disability be service-connected.	Any	You must also have separated or been discharged from service under other than dishonorable conditions.	Not Applicable	Disabled Veterans Plates not included in Federal veteran benefits	<b>Veteran Disabled Plates</b> A person who qualifies for 50% disability may apply for a disabled veteran plate and may register one vehicle with these special plates and is not subject to Motor Vehicle Registration Taxes or registration fees
<a href="#">Eligibility Requirements</a> Compensation benefits require that your disability be	Any	You must also have separated or been discharged from service under other than	Not Applicable	Hunting and Fishing Licenses not included in Federal veteran benefits	<b>Hunting and Fishing Licenses</b> Disabled Veteran resident hunting and sport fishing licenses are available at no

Disability Compensation <sup>7</sup>					
<b>Disability Compensation</b> is a tax free monetary benefit paid to Veterans with disabilities that are the result of a disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active military service. Compensation may also be paid for post-service disabilities that are considered related or secondary to disabilities occurring in service and for disabilities presumed to be related to circumstances of military service, even though they may arise after service. Generally, the degrees of disability specified are also designed to compensate for considerable loss of working time from exacerbations or illnesses.					
Basic Eligibility Criteria as set by VA				Federal Benefits	State Benefits
Active Service Criteria for Veteran Status Minimum Service Requirement	Length of Service Criteria Veteran Status - Period of Service	Discharge Criteria for Veteran Status	Whether the Military Service Was During a Time of War - Certain VA benefits require wartime service		
service-connected.		dishonorable conditions.			charge to honorably discharged veterans with a 50 percent or greater service-connected disability and Alaska residency.
<a href="#">Eligibility Requirements</a> Compensation benefits require that your disability be service-connected.	Any	You must also have separated or been discharged from service under other than dishonorable conditions.	Not Applicable	State Camping Pass not included in Federal veteran benefits	<b>State Camping Pass</b> The legislature granted Disabled Alaskan Veterans (DAV) the right to receive one Alaska State Park Camping Pass free of charge. The DAV Camping Pass, which is valid in all developed Alaska State Park campgrounds, is good for two years.

## Alaska Veterans Needs Assessment

What are the goals?

What are the research questions?

What we did to develop the veterans needs assessment?

In 2014 The Institute of Social and Economic (ISER) was asked by the Alaska Office of Veterans Affairs (OVA) to conduct a needs assessment to inform the OVA's decisions regarding the priorities for the services for Alaskan veterans aged 18-64. The goal of the needs assessment is to identify and measure areas for improvement in providing services to Alaskan veterans and determining the methods to achieve improvement. The needs assessment seeks to identify the gaps that exist between what is currently provided and what is needed, the barriers to closing these gaps, and the resources available to provide needed services that are not yet provided. The research questions consist of:

1. What do Alaska veterans perceive to be their needs?
2. How many Alaska veterans have expressed their needs by seeking services?
3. How are the perceived and expressed needs of Alaska veterans different from and similar to the services provided through service organizations?
4. To what degree are the benefits used by Alaska veterans meeting their needs?

In collaboration with the Alaska Office of Veterans Affairs, from 2014 to 2015 we conducted a literature review, key informant interviews with individuals representing different agencies that provide services to veterans, a statewide survey of Alaska veterans, and focus groups of female veterans and disabled veterans to gather data for this assessment.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF ALASKA VETERANS AND OUR SURVEY RESPONDENTS**

### INTRODUCTION

Before discussing the needs of Alaska veterans, we provide a description of the veteran population in Alaska and the veterans contacted for the statewide survey. The OVA provided a list of names and contact information for 2,950 individuals who have requested a veteran's designation on their Alaska driver's license or identification card living in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Matanuska-Susitna and Kenai Peninsula Boroughs. Questionnaires were also distributed through organizations serving Alaska veterans in these same communities. These selected geographic areas contain 80.3% of the Alaska veteran population. We received almost 600 (585) survey responds via mail, fax, and online. A detail description of our survey methodology is located in the appendix.

Given that we did not have a random sample of the veteran population, we adjusted the sample proportions to match the population characteristics. A survey sample may cover segments of the target population in proportions that do not match the proportions of those segments in the population itself. The differences may arise, for example, from sampling fluctuations, from nonresponse, or because the sample design was not able to cover the entire population. In such situations one can often improve the relation between the sample and the population by adjusting the sampling weights of the cases in the sample so that the marginal totals of the adjusted weights on specified characteristics agree with the corresponding totals for the population.

The demographics of the individuals joining the military have changed with more females joining the ranks. Among our respondents, females tend to be slightly younger than males. Respondents as a whole are well educated. A large portion has higher total annual incomes than the veteran population at large. These veterans have served in all branches of the service with the most having been a part of the US Army. Most respondents were in the military from the 1960's forward serving during the Vietnam era and the Persian Gulf War. Half of the respondents were deployed to a war zone during their service.

### RESULTS

Looking at Table 1 in general, we find that our survey respondents are older, have more education and a smaller percent in the labor force than the population of veterans. The proportion of females and males respondents is close to that of the population of veterans.

**Table 1. Comparison of Alaska veterans and survey respondents**

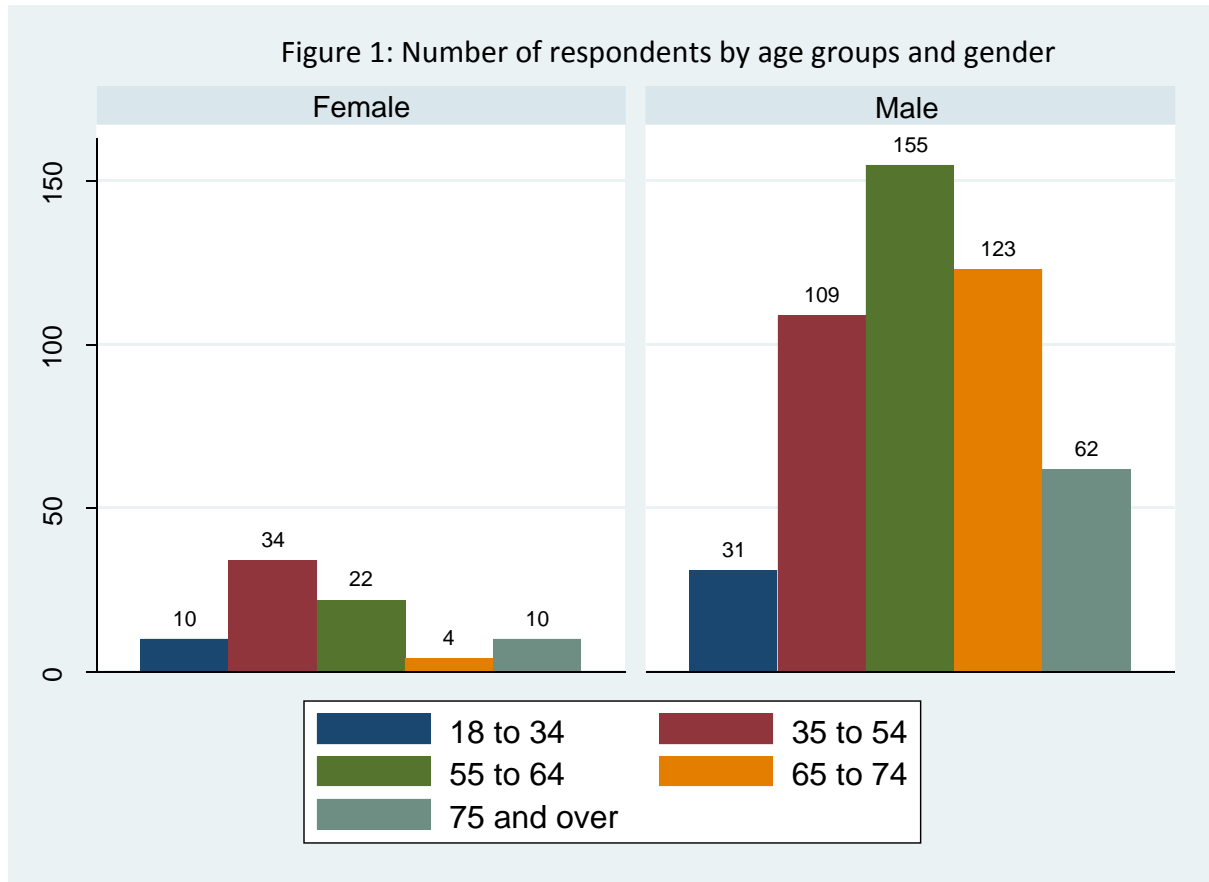
Characteristic Categories	Survey Respondents	5 Year Estimate Population of Veterans
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	85.50%	87.3%
Female	14.45%	12.7%
<b>Age</b>		
18 to 34	7.05%	15.6%
35 to 54	24.60%	34.4%
55 to 64	30.40%	25.3%
65 to 74	21.85%	15.8%
75 and older	12.30%	8.9%
<b>Education</b>		
Less than High School	1.03%	4.1%
High School Graduates	9.40%	25.4%
Some College	43.76%	44.3%
Bachelor's degree or higher	42.56%	26.2%
<b>Employment Status</b>		
In Labor Force	63%	81.2%
<b>Total Numbers</b>		
	585	71,798

We examine the survey respondents in a few different ways. The first is an examination of males and females across age groups. The largest grouping of the males 77.9% is between the ages 35 to 74 years with the females grouping in a slightly younger age range from 18 to 64 years at 78.6% (see Table 2 and Figure 1). This reflects increasing diversity of the military with the growth in the number of females joining the military services.

**Table 2. Number and percent of respondents by age group and gender**

Age Group	18 to 34	35 to 54	55 to 64	65 to 74	75 and over	Missing	Total	Percent of Respondents
<b>Sex</b>								
<b>Male</b>	31	109	155	123	62	17	497	85.5%
<b>Percent</b>	6.2%	21.9%	31.2%	24.8%	12.5%			
<b>Female</b>	10	34	22	4	10	4	84	14.5%
<b>Percent</b>	11.9%	40.5%	26.2%	4.8%	11.9%			
<b>Total</b>	41	143	177	127	72	21	581	





The survey respondents tend to be well educated with an equal percent (86.9%) of males and females having some college or more education (see Table 3 and Figure 2).

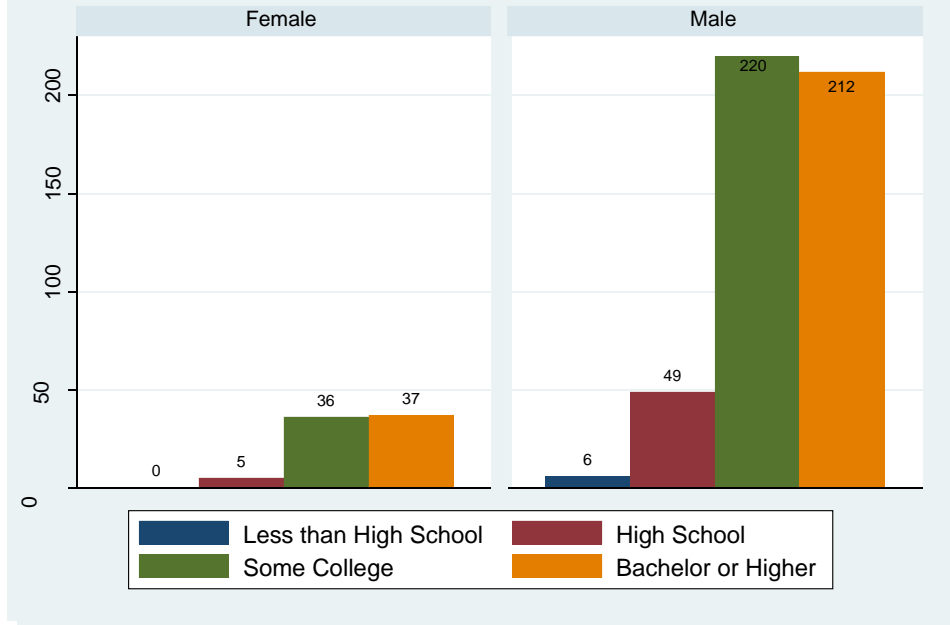
**Table 3. Number and percent of respondents' highest level of education completed**

Highest Level of Education Completed (per ACS categories)	Number	Percent
High School Graduate	55	9.4%
Less than high school	6	1.0%
Some college or associate's degree	256	43.8%
Bachelor's or higher	249	42.7%
Missing	19	3.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Table 4. Number and percent of respondents by gender and highest level of education completed**

Sex	Less than High School	High School	Some College	Bachelor or Higher	Missing	Total
<b>Male</b>	6	49	220	212	10	497
		9.9%	44.3%	42.7%		
<b>Female</b>	0	5	36	37	6	84
		6.0%	42.9%	44.1%		
<b>Total</b>	6	54	256	249	16	581

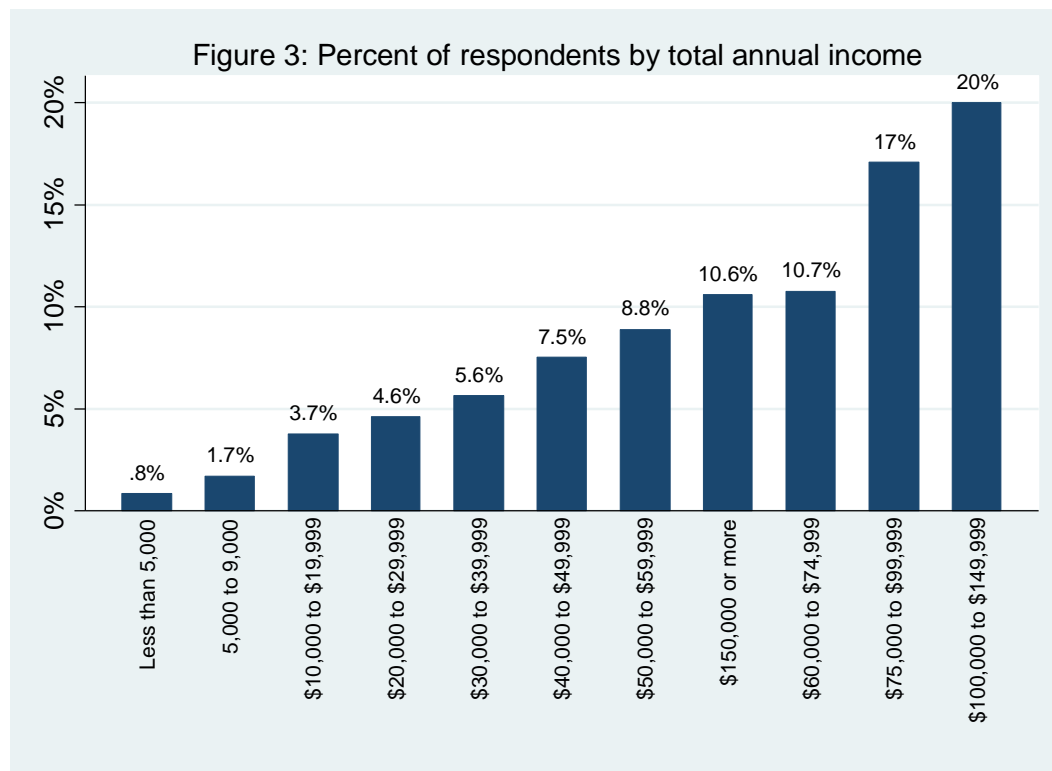
**Figure 2: Number and percent of respondents by gender and highest level of education completed**



Almost 60% of the survey respondents (58.3%) had total annual household income of \$60,000 or more.

**Table 5. Number and percent of respondents by total annual income all sources**

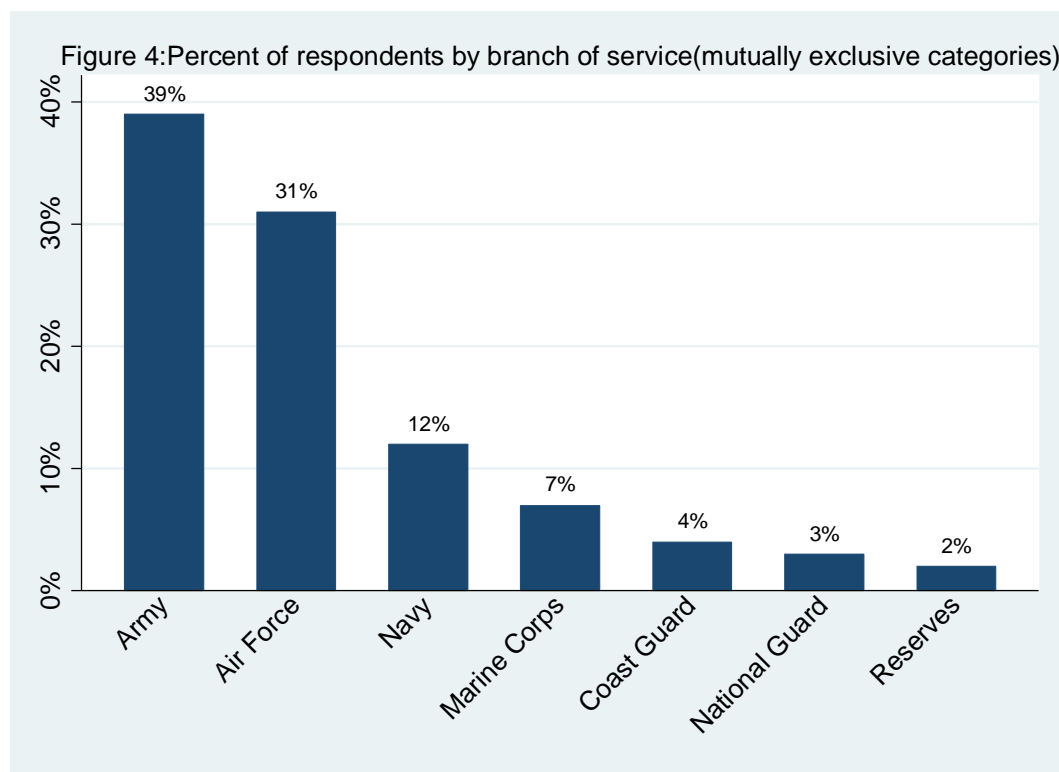
Income	Number	Percent
Less than \$5,000	5	0.9%
\$5,000 to \$9,999	10	1.7%
\$10,000 to \$19,999	22	3.8%
\$20,000 to \$29,999	27	4.6%
\$30,000 to \$39,999	33	5.6%
\$40,000 to \$49,999	44	7.6%
\$50,000 to \$59,999	52	8.9%
\$60,000 to \$74,999	63	10.7%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	100	17.0%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	117	20.0%
\$150,000 or more	62	10.6%
Missing/Blank	50	8.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>100.0%</b>



Tables 6, 7, and 8 and Figures 4 and 5 tell us more about the military service of the survey respondents. Half of the respondents were deployed to a war zone during their active duty. Most of the veterans served in the Army (39%) followed by the Air Force (31%). The largest group of respondents (28%) was in the military during the Vietnam Era Wartime Service (August 1964 to May 1975) with an additional 27% serving from May 1975 to July 1990.

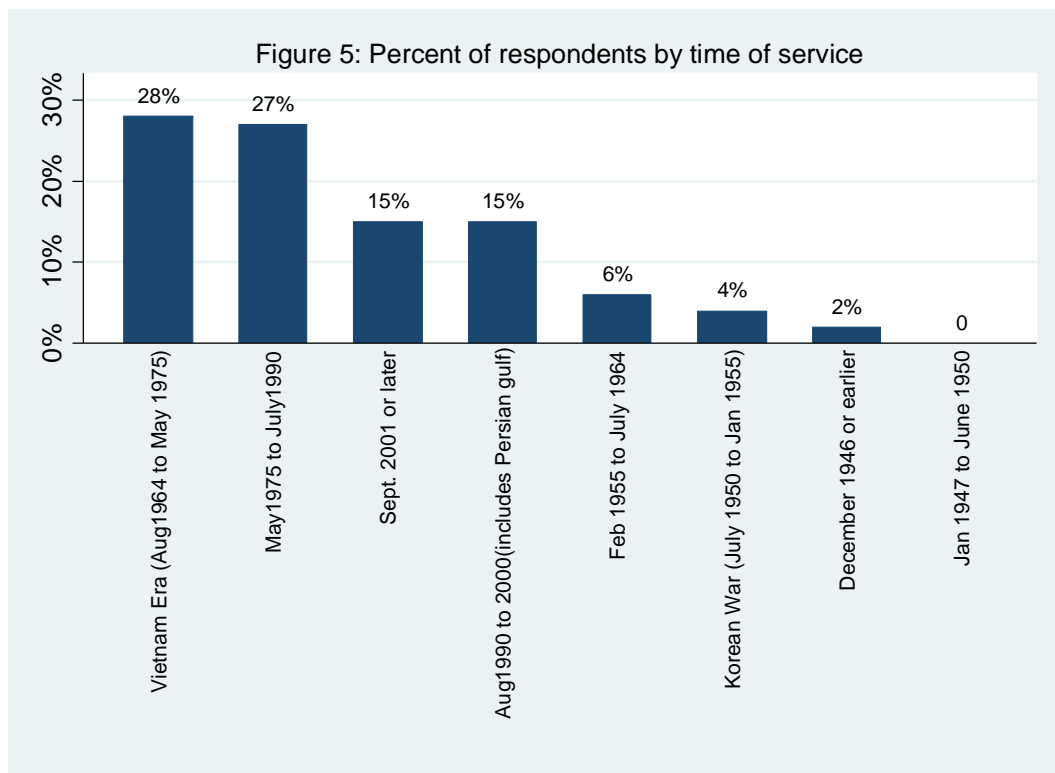
**Table 6: Percent of respondents by branch of service (mutually exclusive categories)**

Branch of Service	Percent of Respondents
Army	39%
Navy	12%
Air Force	31%
Marine Corps	7%
Coast Guard	4%
National Guard	3%
Reserves	2%



**Table 7. Percent of respondents by time of service**

Time of Military Service	Percent of Respondents
December 1946 or earlier	2%
Jan 1947 to June 1950	0%
Korean War (July 1950 to January 1955)	4%
February 1955 to July 1964	6%
Vietnam Era (August 1964 to May 1975)	28%
May 1975 to July 1990	27%
August 1990 to 2000 (includes Persian Gulf)	15%
September 2001 or later	15%



**Table 8: Were you deployed to a war zone during your active duty?**

Deployed to a War Zone during Active Duty	Percent of Respondents
No	50.0%
Yes	50.0%

## WHAT ARE THE MOST CRITICAL NEEDS FOR ALASKA VETERANS?

### INTRODUCTION

We asked veterans what they think or feel their needs are to learn about their perceived needs. Respondents were provided a list of choices that included other to allow options we had not considered. To gain a sense of priority, veterans were asked to rank their choices by the most important critical needs for veterans.

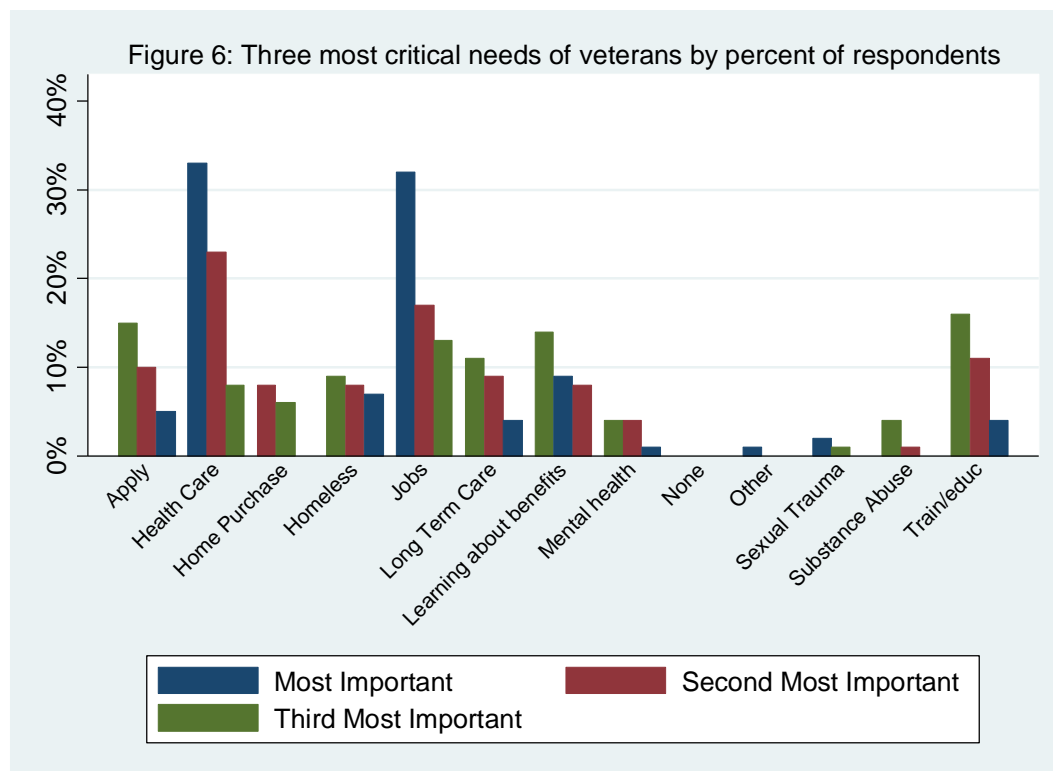
Here we analyzed the respondents ranking by level of importance and reviewed them in detail by age groups and sex. From these analyses, jobs and health care were the highest ranked need in order of importance across the respondents as whole and by age group and gender. Learning about benefits and helping in applying for them stood out in importance for the middle age groups. This may reflect the needs of veterans in their 60's and older (Vietnam era veterans) who are described as increasingly seeking the benefits by our key informants, and they are a large percent of survey respondents. Female veterans had a greater need for dealing with military sexual trauma and the oldest veterans ranked homelessness among their top three needs. In the analysis by age group and sex, education and training is among the top three ranked needs among several of the age groups and males.

### RESULTS

Our first look is at respondents as a whole across the top three needs and all the categories. Health care, jobs, combined learning about and applying for benefits, training and education and homeless veterans were the frequent responses by percent (see Table 9 and Figure 6). Table 9 reflects most of the same list of critical needs by age group of the respondent.

**Table 9. Three most important needs of veterans by percent of respondents**

Needs for Veterans	Most Important Need	Second Most Important Need	Third Most Important Need
Health Care	33%	23%	8%
Home Purchase	0%	8%	11%
Jobs	32%	17%	13%
Long term care/Assisted Living	4%	9%	11%
Learning about available benefits	9%	8%	14%
Dealing with military sexual trauma	2%	0%	1%
Dealing with substance abuse	0%	1%	4%
Apply(Trying to figure out how to apply for benefits)	5%	10%	15%
Homeless veterans	7%	8%	9%
Finding mental health services	1%	4%	4%
Training/Education	4%	11%	16%
Other	4%		



What is seen in the summary table by age is that the ranking of the critical need changes with the age of the respondent. The younger veterans rank jobs and training most frequently as important. Moving into the middle years health care and assistance in applying for benefits becomes most important. In the later years, long term care and homelessness rise to the most important level. There is a clear difference across age groups when identifying the most pressing needs they face. Across age groups, jobs and health are the two most cited important needs (see Table 10).

**Table 10. Summary of three most critical needs by respondent age group**

Age Groups	Most Important Need	Second Most Important Need	Third Most Important Need
20 to 29	Jobs	Jobs	Train/Education
30 to 39	Jobs	Health Care	Jobs
40 to 49	Health Care	Assistance Applying	Train/Education
50 to 59	Health Care	Health Care	Assistance applying
60 to 69	Health Care	Assistance Applying	Long Term Care
70 to 79	Long Term Care	Health Care	Health Care
80 to 89	Homelessness	Health Care	Long Term care

Veterans between the ages of 20 and 40 years thought jobs were most important while those between ages 40 and 70 years stated that health was more important. Homelessness is the most important concern for the oldest veterans ages 80 to 89 years (see Table 11).

**Table 11. Most Important need of veterans by respondent age group**

Needs of Veterans	Age Groups						
	20 to 29	30 to 39	40 to 49	50 to 59	60 to 69	70 to 79	80 to 89
Health Care	25%	18%	33%	36%	39%	25%	8%
Home Purchase	0%	2%	0%	0.00	1%	0%	0%
Jobs	50%	34%	31%	33%	27%	21%	6%
Long Term Care/Assisted Living	0%	0%	6%	4%	4%	28%	3%
Learn about Available Benefits	6%	18%	12%	7%	7%	10%	14%
Dealing with military sexual trauma	0%	5%	0%	3%	1%	0%	0%
Dealing with substance abuse	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Trying to figure out how to apply for benefits	0%	9%	6%	5%	10%	5%	3%
Homeless veterans	14%	4%	6%	6%	5%	3%	52%
Finding mental health services	5%	3%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%
Training/Education		0%	4%	5%	4%	4%	8%
None	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%
Other	0%	0%	2%	1%	1%	0%	5%

Health care and jobs are the most important need regardless of sex of the respondents. Of note in the most important needs of veterans by sex are the responses by females and males to dealing with military sexual trauma. The proportion of female respondents is nine times that of males who report this as the most important need (see Table 12).

**Table 12. Most important need of veterans by gender of respondent**

Needs of Veterans	Male	Female
Health Care	31%	35%
Home Purchase	0%	0%
Jobs	31%	23%
Long term care/assisted Living	6%	0%
Learning about available benefits	10%	10%
Dealing with military sexual trauma	1%	9%
Dealing with substance abuse	0%	0%
Trying to figure out how to apply for benefits	7%	6%
Homeless veterans	6%	12%
Mental Health	1%	5%
Training/education	5%	1%
Other	1%	0%
None	0%	0%



In Tables 13 and 14, we present the second most important needs by age groups. Health care remains high in the 30 to 79 age groups and especially in the 80 to 89 age group and both males and females (see Tables 13 and 14). For the 40 to 49 year olds (21%) and more importantly 60 to 69 year olds (17%) selected learning how to apply for benefits as the second most important need. Veterans may need more assistance in applying for benefits as they consider and start to use benefits as a part of their retirement portfolio for the 60 to 69 age group.

**Table 13. Second most important need of veterans by respondent age group**

Needs of Veterans	Age Groups						
	20 to 29	30 to 39	40 to 49	50 to 59	60 to 69	70 to 79	80 to 89
Health Care	11%	22%	16%	27%	21%	31%	66%
Home Purchase	6%	8%	6%	7%	14%	0%	5%
Jobs	31%	13%	17%	18%	14%	19%	3%
Long Term Care	0%	0%	8%	12%	16%	10%	0%
Learning about benefits	6%	12%	11%	5%	6%	7%	5%
Dealing with military sexual trauma	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Dealing with substance abuse	0%	1%	0%	2%	8%	0%	0%
Trying to figure out how to apply for benefits	9%	10%	21%	7%	67%	13%	17%
Homeless veterans	0%	11%	13%	12%	5%	1%	0%
Finding mental health services	6%	5%	3%	2%	5%	9%	0%
Training/education	29%	18%	5%	9%	10%	5%	3%
Other	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	6%	0%

**Table 14. Second most important need of veterans by gender of respondent**

Needs of Veterans	Male	Female
Health Care	23%	22%
Home Purchase	9%	0%
Jobs	16%	20%
Long Term Care	8%	9%
Learning about benefits	9%	4%
Dealing with military sexual trauma	0%	1%
Dealing with substance abuse	1%	0%
Trying to figure out how to apply for benefits	10%	22%
Homeless veterans	8%	8%
Finding mental health services	4%	4%
Training/education	11%	7%
Other	1%	1%

As we look at the third most important need of veterans (see Tables 15 and 16) there is more diversity of responses. Education and training is relatively high across most of the age groups and for males when we examine needs by gender. Jobs are important for veterans 30 to 39 years of age and have the second highest percent of male of respondents. Learning about and applying for benefits is high for 40 to 49 years age group and both males and females.

**Table 15. Third most important need of veterans by respondent age group**

Needs of Veterans	Third Most Important Needs						
	20 to 29	30 to 39	40 to 49	50 to 59	60 to 69	70 to 79	80 to 89
Health Care	3%	11%	12%	7%	6%	15%	3%
Home Purchase	6%	3%	5%	7%	9%	3%	0%
Jobs	6%	27%	17%	10%	7%	13%	3%
Long Term Care	0%	3%	4%	6%	19%	6%	57%
Learning about benefits	22%	5%	16%	17%	10%	20%	6%
Dealing with military sexual trauma	0%	2%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%
Dealing with substance abuse	25%	2%	2%	0%	3%	2%	0%
Trying to figure out how to apply for benefits	0%	19%	4%	22%	16%	14%	8%
Homeless veterans	0%	6%	12%	13%	74%	12%	8%
Finding mental health services	0%	8%	8%	4%	2%	0%	0%
Training/education	31%	14%	19%	13%	16%	12%	14%
Other	6%	0%	1%	2%	1%	2%	0%

Homeless veterans stand out as the highest category for female respondents when we look at the third most important need by gender (see Table 16).

**Table 16. Third most important need of veterans by gender of respondent**

Needs of Veterans	Male	Female
Health Care	8%	10%
Home Purchase	6%	3%
Jobs	14%	5%
Long Term Care	11%	11%
Learning about benefits	13%	17%
Dealing with military sexual trauma	1%	2%
Dealing with substance abuse	4%	1%
Trying to figure out how to apply for benefits	15%	8%
Homeless veterans	7%	23%
Finding mental health services	4%	5%
Training/education	16%	13%
Other	1%	1%

The majority of the homeless responses are from females respondents 35 to 54 years of age (see Table 17).

**Table 17. Third most important need of veterans by number of female respondents**

Needs of Veterans	Age Groups				Total
	18 to 34	35 to 54	55 to 64	65 to 74	
Health Care	2	3	0	1	7
Home Purchase	0	2	0	0	2
Jobs	0	2	2	0	4
Long term care/assisted Living	1	2	4	2	12
Learning about available benefits	1	4	2	0	7
Dealing with military sexual trauma	0	1	0	0	2
Dealing with substance abuse	0	0	0	0	3
Trying to figure out how to apply for benefits	0	3	3	0	7
Homeless veterans	2	6	2	0	10
Mental Health	0	3	1	0	5
Training or Education	3	3	2	0	8
Other	0	1	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>69</b>

## WHAT DO VETERANS KNOW ABOUT BENEFITS - FEDERAL AND STATE?

### INTRODUCTION

Part of assessing the needs of veterans is measuring how they learn about benefits that are available for their use. Which benefits are the most frequently used? What are the reliable sources of information for veteran benefits? In order to do this, we asked veterans how they learned about the availability of benefits; their eligibility; and the application process. We also explored the reasons veterans are choosing to not use their benefits.

In the statewide survey, we posed a series of questions to measure awareness and use of federal and state veteran benefits. To more fully understand the veterans' responses to the survey questions we interviewed representatives<sup>8</sup> of organizations that provide services to veterans such as the Veterans for Foreign Wars, Military Order of the Purple Heart and American Legion. We also spoke to female veterans and disabled veterans in focus groups<sup>9</sup>.

From the interviews and focus groups, we found that in large portion of veterans learn the most from each other – one on one or through veteran organizations. Transition Assistant Programs (TAPS) for the most recent veterans appears to be effective in delivering a great deal of information to veterans upon their exit from active duty. But this “one and done” method of providing benefit information to veterans does not support sustained knowledge. Veterans expressed a need for targeted ongoing follow-up communications highlighting benefits that address specific needs that are common at that point in the veterans' lifecycle. From our analysis we also support targeted benefits messaging by age group and sex throughout the veteran's life cycle. Many veterans offered suggestions on how to better keep them informed about the benefits. These can be found as in the recommendations section of this report.

Veterans in the focus groups commented that the VA website has a considerable amount of information on benefits as does the Alaska state website. However, both require non-negligible drill down to figure out eligibility and how to apply. They want a simpler way to figure out if a benefit meets their need; what the eligibility criteria are and how to claim the benefit. From the survey respondents the most frequently claimed federal VA benefit is health services. Disability compensation, home loans, and education and training are also highly claimed federal benefits for the respondents as a whole and across all age groups. In contrast few veterans claim VA vocational rehabilitation and training, life insurance, pension, and employment benefits.

Using claimed benefits also as a measure of awareness for Alaska veteran benefits the driver's license and license plates designation for a disabled veterans are most claimed. Veterans in the

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<sup>8</sup> We conducted key informant interviews with representatives of organizations that serve veterans. A detail summary of the interviews and methodology is located in the appendices.

<sup>9</sup> We conducted a focus group for female veterans and another for disabled veterans. A summary of the focus group methodology and discussions is located in the appendices.

focus groups commented that most of the Alaska benefits are related to disability status which may account for some of the varying level of knowledge and use.

## RESULTS

### **How Veterans Learn about Benefits**

Veterans told us they most often learn about veteran benefits and how to apply for them through word of mouth from other veterans. Vets seek out other vets to help them. This sharing of information is part of the veteran culture. Their sources include veterans in service organizations, coworkers, friends of friends, etc. Through these sources they find the most reliable information from those who had left active duty and gone through the veteran system.

Veteran service organizations provide a great deal of information, and support to veterans applying for benefits. Some of these are the Alaska Veterans Organization for Women, Veteran of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, American Legion, and the Military Order of the Purple Heart that give a lot of assistance. Representatives of veteran service organizations talked about several veteran focused events in the community that they organize and/or participate in putting together. Activities mentioned were: Stand Down events, homeless and mental health summits, veterans job fairs; and designated veteran outreach events which have occurred for example in Barrow, Dillingham and Juneau. Key informants also mentioned collaboration with other organizations such as: Alaska Healing Hearts, Project Healing Waters, and Wounded Warriors Project to promote their services.

The importance of Stand Down events was corroborated by veterans in the focus groups who stated that they were effective. These focus group participants further explained that these events are good for networking. There was a misperception by some who thought that these events were solely for homeless veterans.

From talking with the veterans we learned that there is a demarcation of before and after implementation of the Transition Assistance Programs (TAPS). As a result of TAPS, veterans felt they received more information about their benefits. Before TAPS, there was little information provided to veterans in an organized matter. Some mentioned receiving a booklet upon exiting the military. They said the booklet (which is still in use today) is good for non-medical benefits; however, it can become dated depending on when the veteran exited the military. Information similar to that in the booklet can be found online at the federal VA website.

Key informants talked about TAPS classes as transitional information courses provided to military members who are leaving the services in part to inform them of veteran benefits. A couple of the responding key informants are regular presenters in these classes. Since TAPS, veterans thought that information about benefits is a lot better. They are getting more information. TAPS is mandatory and for most that have gone through the program they feel it is a pretty good introduction to veteran benefits. They describe the program as providing a considerable amount of information but with it not being immediately applicable some felt it was not useful.

Veterans in the focus groups thought that rarely is information sent via mail or email from the Veterans Administration concerning benefits. The informational items they have received most frequently pertained to health care such as flu shot reminders. There was quite a bit of discussion of the recently sent card informing veterans they could seek services outside the VA system if they had been excessively delayed access to services. Discussion in both the female and disabled groups highlighted both a lack of clarity and insufficient explanation of the expanded choice for veterans to seek health care outside the VA system and how it works.

Additional methods used to inform veterans of services noted by the key informants include: 800 numbers, radio advertisements, websites, advertise at job centers, outreach activities in corrections system and on the streets, Facebook, Twitter, and flyers. The veterans added that sometimes a commercial or news on television or radio is useful for information. Disabled veterans mentioned the use of the state website. This may be because many of the Alaska veteran benefits are for disabled veterans.

### **Why veterans do not use their benefits**

During the focus groups, we were told some veterans don't use their benefits because they feel it's too much paperwork. Sometimes the distances to services are a deterrent to access benefits. Some female veterans did not have a very good experience in the military and when they go to the VA they feel they were treated poorly there as well.

Sometimes the veterans just do not know what benefits are available. They have not drilled down on the VA website. "There's a whole lot of stuff on there. It would be nice if there was something on the VA website that said. Do you need this? Then it takes you somewhere else and something simple that says you drill down through it and yes you can apply for this."

Veterans in the focus groups explained that during active duty, the culture of the military may discourage the reporting of illness or injury. There is a social stigma for being absent from work and seeking health services. The sick or injured members may feel that their inability to work let's down their fellow unit members and adversely affects the workload. By not recording injury and illness during active duty, the member's medical record will lack information that may later assist them in qualifying for veterans benefits.

Veterans think that the national website is good and they like the "What's new" section. The national VA website, VFW, and DVA websites were noted as places that were considered as trustworthy sources to obtain information on benefits. Veterans thought it would be great if the state of Alaska website had a similar "what's new" for Alaska and local news for veterans. They would like more locally focused information on Alaska or Anchorage and veteran benefits.

### **How Many Veterans have Claimed or Received Benefits**

More than three quarters, 79% of female and male veterans responding to the survey have claimed or received VA disability compensation (see Table 18).

**Table 18. Are you receiving, or have you ever claimed or received VA benefits?  
by gender of respondent**

Have you ever claimed or received VA benefits	Male	Female	Total
<b>Yes</b>	79%	79%	79%
<b>No</b>	20%	18%	19%

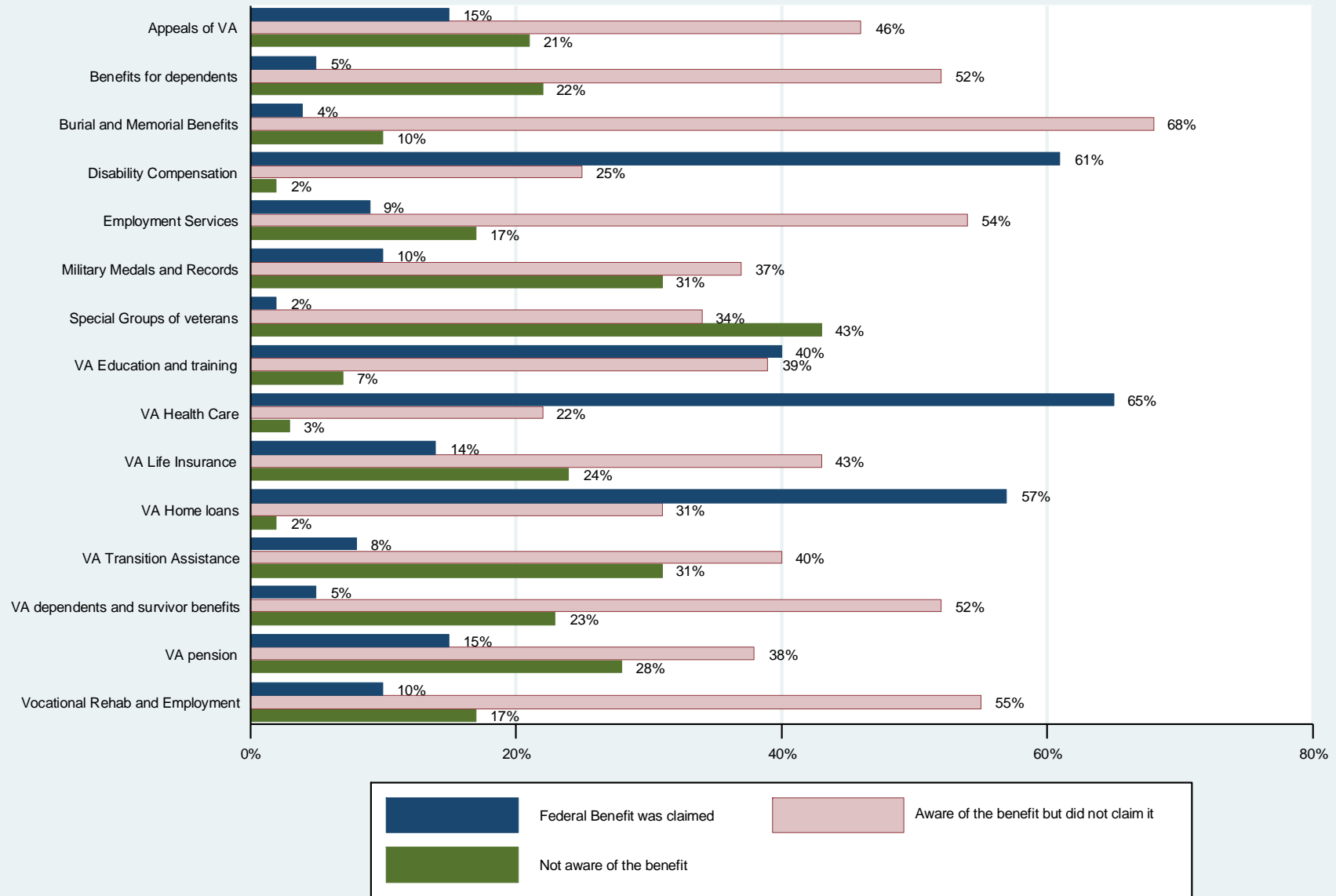
### Federal Veteran Benefits

The four federal veteran benefits that were most likely to be claimed by our survey respondents were *VA health care*, *VA disability compensation*, *VA home loans* and *VA education and training*. While there is variation in how likely individuals are to claim certain benefits, there seems to be fairly high awareness across categories. In all three or four categories, 57 % or greater of the respondents were aware of the benefit's availability (health care, disability compensation, and VA home loans). VA education and training was at 40% having claimed this benefit. Aside from these categories, no other benefit was claimed by more than 15 % of the respondents even though the majority of the respondents knew about their availability. With 61% of respondents claiming disability compensation, only 10% have claimed vocational rehabilitation services. In addition, few veterans have claimed VA pension (15%), life insurance (14%), and VA employment services (9%) (see Table 19 and Figure 7).

**Table 19: Percent of respondents by knowledge of federal benefits**

Federal VA Benefits	I have claimed this benefit	I am aware of this benefit but have not claimed it	I was not aware of this benefit	Missing/ Blank
<b>VA Health Care</b>	65%	22%	3%	9%
<b>VA Disability Compensation</b>	61%	25%	2%	11%
<b>VA Home loans</b>	57%	31%	2%	9%
<b>VA Education and Training</b>	40%	39%	7%	14%
<b>VA Pension</b>	15%	38%	28%	19%
<b>Appeals of VA</b>	15%	46%	21%	18%
<b>VA Life Insurance</b>	14%	43%	24%	19%
<b>Vocational Rehab and Employment</b>	10%	55%	17%	18%
<b>Military Medals and Records</b>	10%	37%	31%	21%
<b>VA Employment Services</b>	9%	54%	17%	20%
<b>VA Transition Assistance</b>	8%	40%	31%	20%
<b>Benefits for dependents for dependents survivors health care</b>	5%	52%	22%	21%
<b>VA Dependents and Survivor Health Care</b>	5%	52%	23%	20%
<b>Burial and Memorial Benefits</b>	4%	68%	10%	19%

Figure 7: Percent of respondents by knowledge of federal benefits





The four most popular federal VA benefits vary in how they are used by different age groups. While education and training is claimed by the vast majority of 20 to 29 year olds, that same group does not make much use of VA health care (see Table 20).

**Table 20. Percent of respondents claiming the most frequently claimed federal Benefits by age groups**

Most Frequently Claimed Federal VA Benefits	Age Groups						
	20 to 29	30 to 39	40 to 49	50 to 59	60 to 69	70 to 79	80 to 89
VA Health Care	28%	60%	78%	67%	68%	69%	46%
VA Disability Compensation	54%	76%	76%	68%	52%	47%	23%
VA Home Loans	21%	58%	65%	60%	60%	67%	51%
VA Education and Training	91%	65%	34%	28%	32%	41%	18%

### Alaska Veteran Benefits

The most commonly claimed state veteran benefits by the survey respondents are the veteran driver's license, veterans license plates, hunting and fishing licenses, property exemption, education benefits, and veterans housing and residential loans. Some relevant information from Table 21 and Figure 8 include:

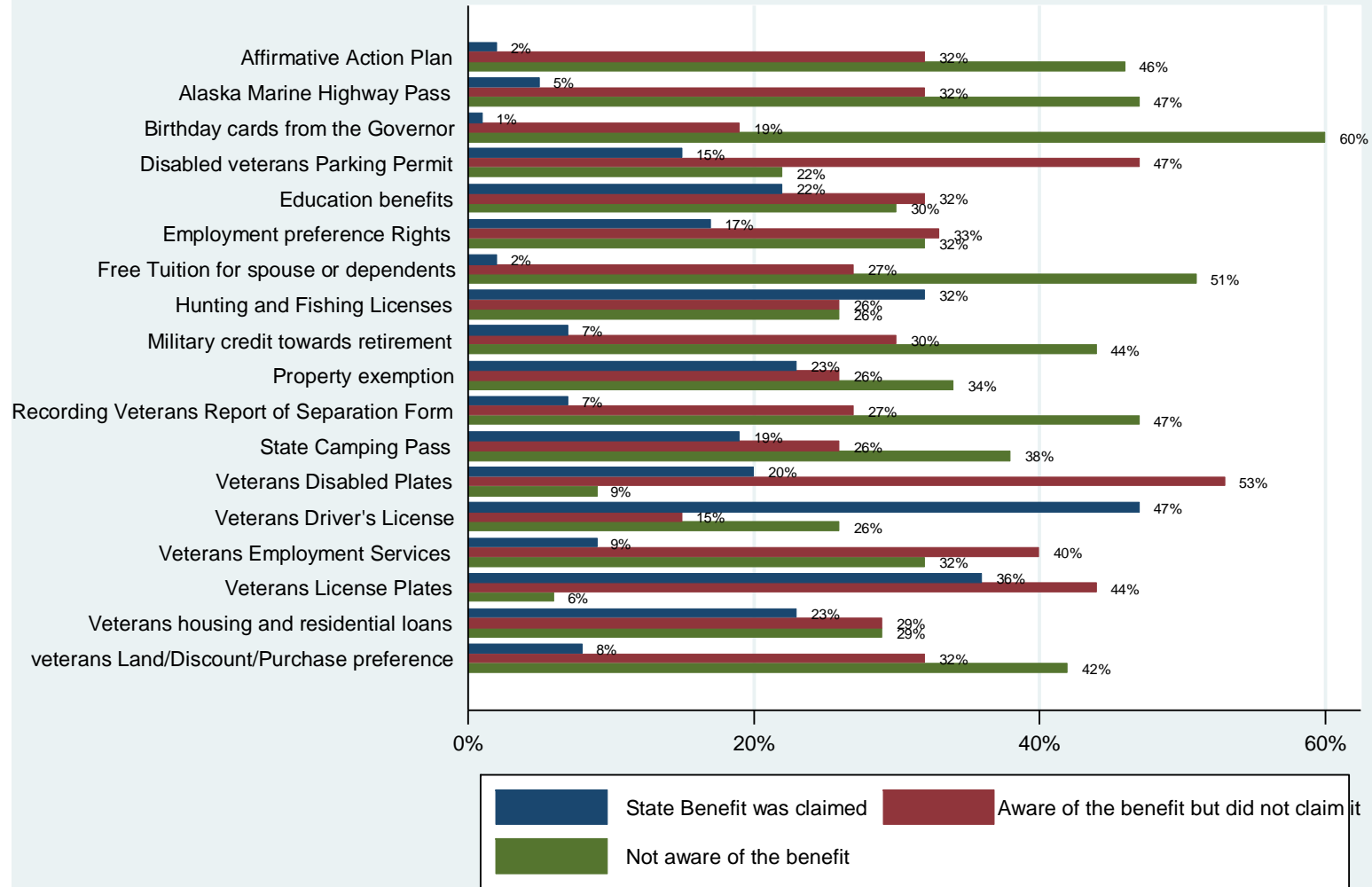
- Only 9 percent of the respondents claimed veteran employment services.
- Only 2 percent of the respondents claimed free tuition for spouse or dependents.
- Awareness seems to be an issue with exception of veteran disabled benefits, and veteran license plates.
- Around 1/3 of our respondents were aware of the benefits but did not claim them.

The large percent claiming veteran recognition on their driver's license is to be expected because the contact information for the statewide survey is from the Department of Motor Vehicle list of veterans. The use of this list may have also influenced the high percent of veterans claiming disabled veteran plates.

**Table 21. Percent of respondents by knowledge of Alaska state benefits**

<b>Alaska Veterans Benefits</b>	<b>I have claimed this benefit</b>	<b>I am aware of this benefit but have not claimed it</b>	<b>I was not aware of this benefit</b>	<b>Missing/Blank</b>
<b>Veterans Driver's License</b>	47%	15%	26%	12%
<b>Veterans License Plates</b>	36%	44%	6%	14%
<b>Hunting and Fishing Licenses</b>	32%	26%	26%	16%
<b>Veterans Housing and Residential Loans</b>	23%	29%	29%	18%
<b>Property Exemption</b>	23%	26%	34%	17%
<b>Education benefits</b>	22%	32%	30%	15%
<b>Veterans Disabled Plates</b>	20%	53%	9%	17%
<b>State Camping Pass</b>	19%	26%	38%	16%
<b>Employment preference Rights</b>	17%	33%	32%	17%
<b>Disabled veterans Parking Permit</b>	15%	47%	22%	16%
<b>Veterans Employment Services</b>	9%	40%	32%	19%
<b>Veterans Land/Discount/Purchase Preference</b>	8%	32%	42%	18%
<b>Recording Veterans Report of Separation Form</b>	7%	27%	47%	20%
<b>Military credit towards retirement</b>	7%	30%	44%	19%
<b>Alaska Marine Highway Pass</b>	5%	32%	47%	16%
<b>Affirmative Action Plan</b>	2%	32%	46%	20%
<b>Free Tuition for Spouse or Dependents</b>	2%	27%	51%	20%
<b>Birthday cards from the Governor</b>	1%	19%	60%	19%

Figure 8: Percent of respondents by knowledge of state benefits



The most popular Alaska veteran benefits vary in how they are used by different age groups. Similar to federal benefits 20 to 39 year olds are high users of Alaska veteran education benefits. The Alaska veteran property tax exemption is popular among those 40 to 59 years of age. It appears that in the age groups of 30 and higher obtaining housing is a goal with increased usage in the 30 to 39 year old group for the state housing and residential loans and federal VA home loans (see Table 20 and 22).

**Table 22. Percent of Respondents claiming the most frequently claimed state benefits by age group**

Most Frequently Claimed Alaska Veteran Benefits	Age Groups						
	20 to 29	30 to 39	40 to 49	50 to 59	60 to 69	70 to 79	80 to 89
Veterans Housing and residential loans	12%	31%	23%	22%	25%	27%	5%
Education benefits	54%	42%	26%	8%	17%	12%	7%
Property Exemption	5%	14%	30%	29%	24%	23%	2%

### Eligibility and Claim Submission

Per the key informants, one of the most frequently requested services across the organizations was help with filing a VA claim or obtaining benefits. Most if not all of the key informant respondents provide education and counseling with this enrollment/eligibility process. Some provide a warm hand off to another organization or individual to assist the veteran while others will spend hours, weeks, and months guiding and supporting the veteran through this process.

Many explained that the first thing a veteran has to do to obtain their veteran benefits is to enroll with the U.S. Veterans Administration (VA). This is an important key step in determining if the veteran is eligible for benefits, which benefits, and the quantity of a service they can obtain. From the descriptions provided this can be a very quick – not consuming much time- if the veteran has the correct documentation. Lacking this documentation can generate lengthy delays in enrollment and access of benefits. To secure the VA card for health benefits or to prove eligibility for benefits to file a claim for other veterans benefits, several of the key informants shared descriptions of the documentation – a DD214 – discharge papers and separation documents which serves as their record of service and is key documentation to claim/apply for veterans benefits.

After listening to veterans in the focus groups it appears that the two step process for eligibility as outlined in our section “Who is a veteran?” is not clearly understood. Also, it is difficult for veterans to get information on the reasons for what they think of as lengthy delays when submitting their claims for benefits.

## HOW ARE VETERANS USING THEIR BENEFITS?

### HEALTH SERVICES

#### INTRODUCTION

When most people think of veterans' benefits they are generally thinking about health care services. The VA Health Administration is America's largest integrated health care system serving 8.76 million veterans each year. Services are provided through VA Medical Centers (VAMC), Outpatient Clinics (OPC), Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC), and VA Community Living Centers (VA Nursing Home) Programs. Out of the approximately 31,000 Alaska veterans currently enrolled in the VA medical system, the federal VA treats 16,336 patients<sup>10</sup> annually with managed care that costs nearly \$153 million per year.

In Alaska the Veterans Health Administration consists of<sup>11</sup>:

#### **VA Health Care System**

Anchorage: Alaska VA Healthcare System

#### **Outpatient Clinic**

Juneau: Juneau VA Outreach Clinic

#### **Community Based Outpatient Clinic**

Fort Wainwright: Fairbanks VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic

Kenai: Kenai VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic

Wasilla: Mat-Su VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic

#### **Vet Center**

Anchorage: Anchorage Vet Center

Fairbanks: Fairbanks Vet Center

Soldotna: Kenai Vet Center Outstation

Wasilla: Wasilla Vet Center

Health services were the most talked about benefit in the focus groups due in large part to the difficulties they experience in navigating the system. Comments about the inability to schedule timely appointments, impersonal care, and others are similar to those found in other large health care systems. Veterans who know and use the healthvet electronic personal health record like it. Based on discussions in both focus groups it appears that veterans lack sufficient information to understand the advantages and disadvantages of some health care opportunities.

According to our survey respondents, most had used VA health services in the last six months and planned to use these services in the future. The use of health services increases with the

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<sup>10</sup> 2012 Annual Report .Alaska Department of Military & Veterans Affairs:

[http://dmva.alaska.gov/content/annual%20reports/2012DMVAAnnualReport\\_web.pdf](http://dmva.alaska.gov/content/annual%20reports/2012DMVAAnnualReport_web.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> US Department of Veterans Affairs, Locations, accessed May 19, 2015 at

<http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/state.asp?dnum=ALL&STATE=AK>

disability rating of the veteran. The VA is the most frequently used payer for VA health care and health care obtained by veterans at other locations.

Females represent a growing proportion of veterans which means that their use of health services and interaction with veteran benefits in general differ drastically. According to the Department of Veteran Affairs, 11% (8,672) of all Alaska veterans are women. They are the fastest growing group in the veteran population.<sup>12</sup>

“Among women veteran patients age 45-64 years, a particularly high proportion of Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander women use non-VA (fee) medical care services, and among women 65+ years old, a particularly high proportion of American Indian/Alaska Native women use these services. Some women in these groups may reside in more remote areas such as rural Indian Reservations, Alaska, or outlying Pacific Islands, where availability of Non-VA (Fee) Medical Care services may augment access to care, in part by reducing distance travelled. Provision of services through the non-VA (fee) medical care system may also enhance ability to meet the requirements of VHA policy which states that women should be able to receive mammography services within 50 miles of home.”<sup>13</sup>

The survey shows that VA primary care, women’s health, or gynecology clinics are the most frequently used by female veterans for women’s health care services. Female veterans aged 40 to 59 years were the most frequent users of women’s health care services.

## RESULTS

There was a discussion among focus group participants of the recent mailer on the use of health services outside of the VA system. They were aware and understood that the VA had raised the possibility of using health services out of the VA system. However, it seems that there has been insufficient education for veterans to learn about and understand the advantages and disadvantages of using this opportunity for their own health care.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> US Department of Veteran Affairs , <http://www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/index.asp>, accessed on May 20, 2015

<sup>13</sup> Women’s Health Services, Office of Patient Care Services, Veterans Health Administration, *Sourcebook Volume 3: Women Veterans in the Veterans Health Administration*, February, 2014, <http://www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/index.asp> , accessed May 20, 2015

<sup>14</sup> ““In response to the waiting list scandal of 2014, Congress passed the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014. VACAA can best be understood as a quarter-step in the direction of expanded choice for veterans. The Act allows some veterans to seek care outside of VA facilities if they meet a number of bureaucratic criteria, which are determined and evaluated by the VA itself. Furthermore, the provisions of VACAA that assist veterans in obtaining health care outside of the VA system are of limited duration. Congress appropriated \$ 15 billion under VACAA for the purpose of offering veterans health care through Non-VA entities; the congressional Budget Office projects that the bulk of these funds will be used up in a few years.” Roy,Avik and Darin Selnik, “Health Independence for Veterans,” National Affairs, Number 23, Spring 2015. <http://www.nationalaffairs.com/>

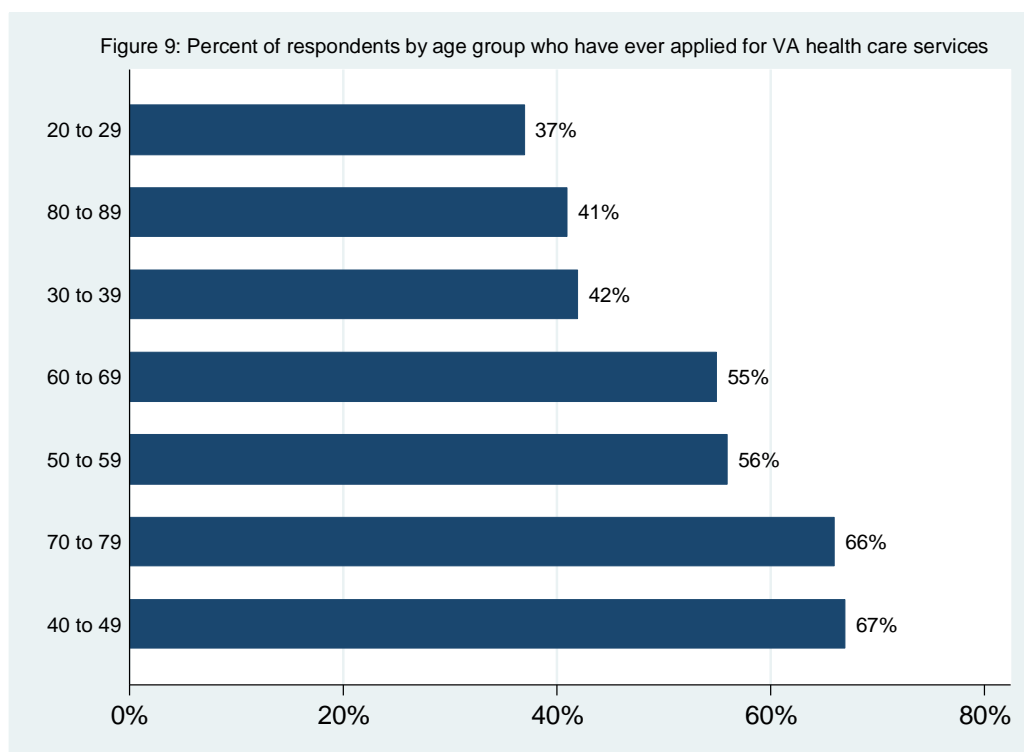
From the survey of veterans we learned that slightly more than half, 55%, have applied for health services as a benefit (see table 23). By age group, veterans 40 to 49 years of age had the highest percent at 67% who have applied for VA health care (see Table 24 and Figure 9).

**Table 23. Percent of respondents who have applied for VA health care benefit**

Applied for VA Health Care Benefit	Percent of Respondents
<b>Yes</b>	<b>55%</b>
<b>No</b>	29%
<b>Missing/Blank</b>	14%
<b>Missing as intended</b>	1%
<b>Entry error</b>	0%

**Table 24. Percent of respondents who have ever applied for VA health care services by age group**

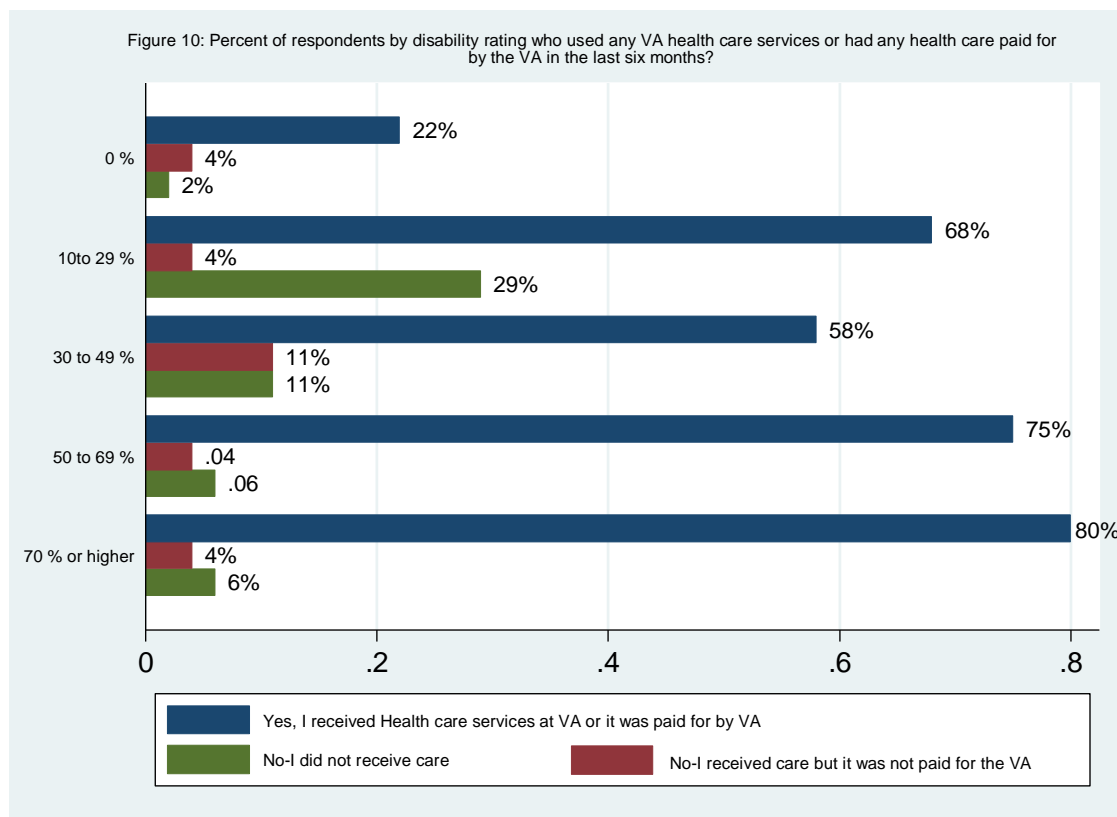
<b>20 to 29</b>	0.37
<b>30 to 39</b>	0.42
<b>40 to 49</b>	<b>0.67</b>
<b>50 to 59</b>	0.56
<b>60 to 69</b>	0.55
<b>70 to 79</b>	0.66
<b>80 to 89</b>	0.41



Veterans with high disability ratings were considerably more likely to have received health care services at the VA or paid for by the VA - 46.7% (see Table 25). At least three quarters of those veterans with a disability rating of 50% or higher receive health care services at the VA or paid for by the VA (see Table 25 and Figure 10).

**Table 25. Percent of respondents by disability rating who used any VA health care services or had any health care paid for by the VA in the last six months**

Disability Rating	Yes - I received HS at VA or Paid for by VA	No- I received H.S but not at the VA	No- I did not receive H.S
0%	22%	4%	2%
10% to 29%	68%	4%	29%
30% to 49%	58%	11%	11%
50% to 69%	75%	4%	6%
70% or more	80%	4%	6%
Don't know	42%	15%	3%
Missing/blank	5%	10%	25%
Missing as intended	25%	15%	15%
Entry error	57%	7%	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>11%</b>



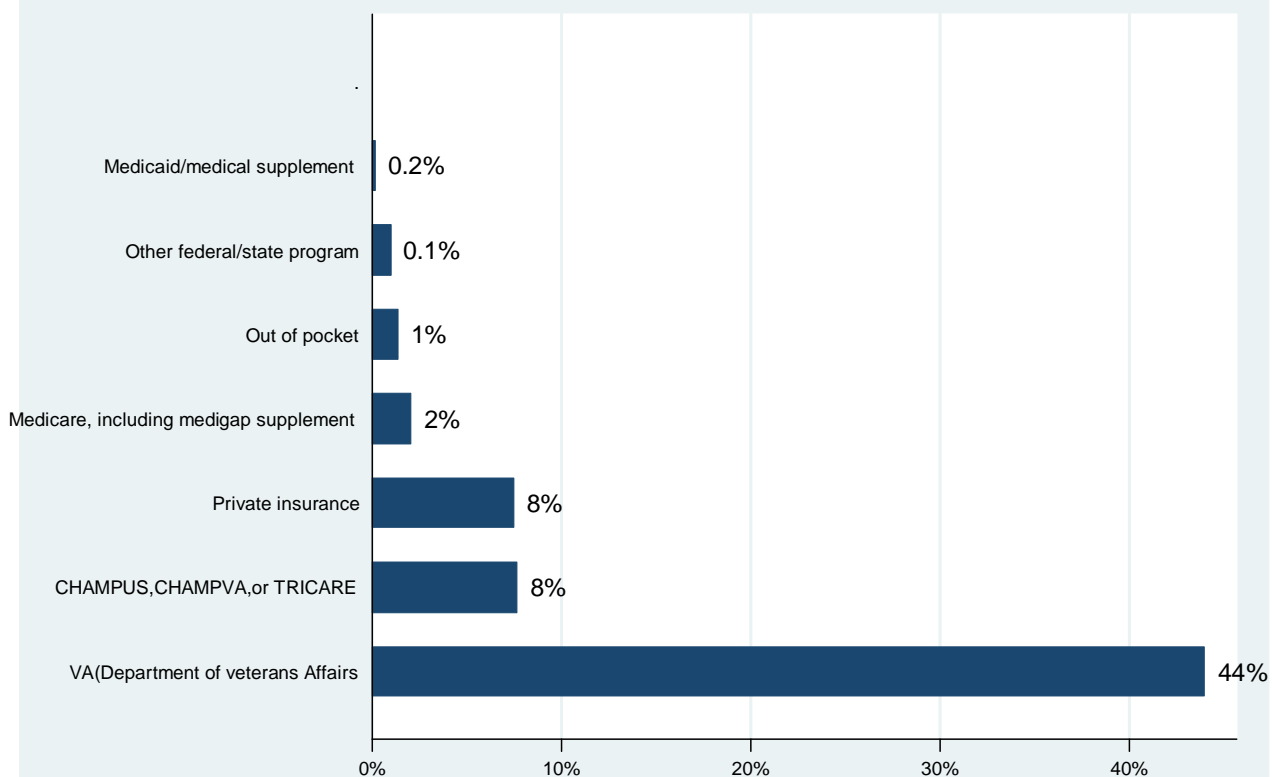


Among those who had used VA health care services in the prior six months, the VA by far was the most used payer source for any VA health care services or any health care obtained (see Table 26 and Figure 11).

**Table 26. Percent of respondents who have used VA health care in the last six months by financial support for that care**

Financial Support VA Health Care	Percent of Respondents
<b>VA (Department of Veterans Affairs)</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>CHAMPUS, CHAMPVA, or TRICARE</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Medicare, including medigap supplement</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Medicaid/medical supplement</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Other federal/state program</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Private insurance</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Out of pocket</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Other source</b>	<b>1%</b>

**Figure 11: Percent of respondents who have used VA health care in the last six months by source or sources of financial support for that care?**



In the prior six months, about half of veterans at most levels of disability rating used the VA as the primary payer for health care (see Table 27).

**Table 27. Percent of respondents by disability rating who have used VA health care in the last six months by payer source for that care**

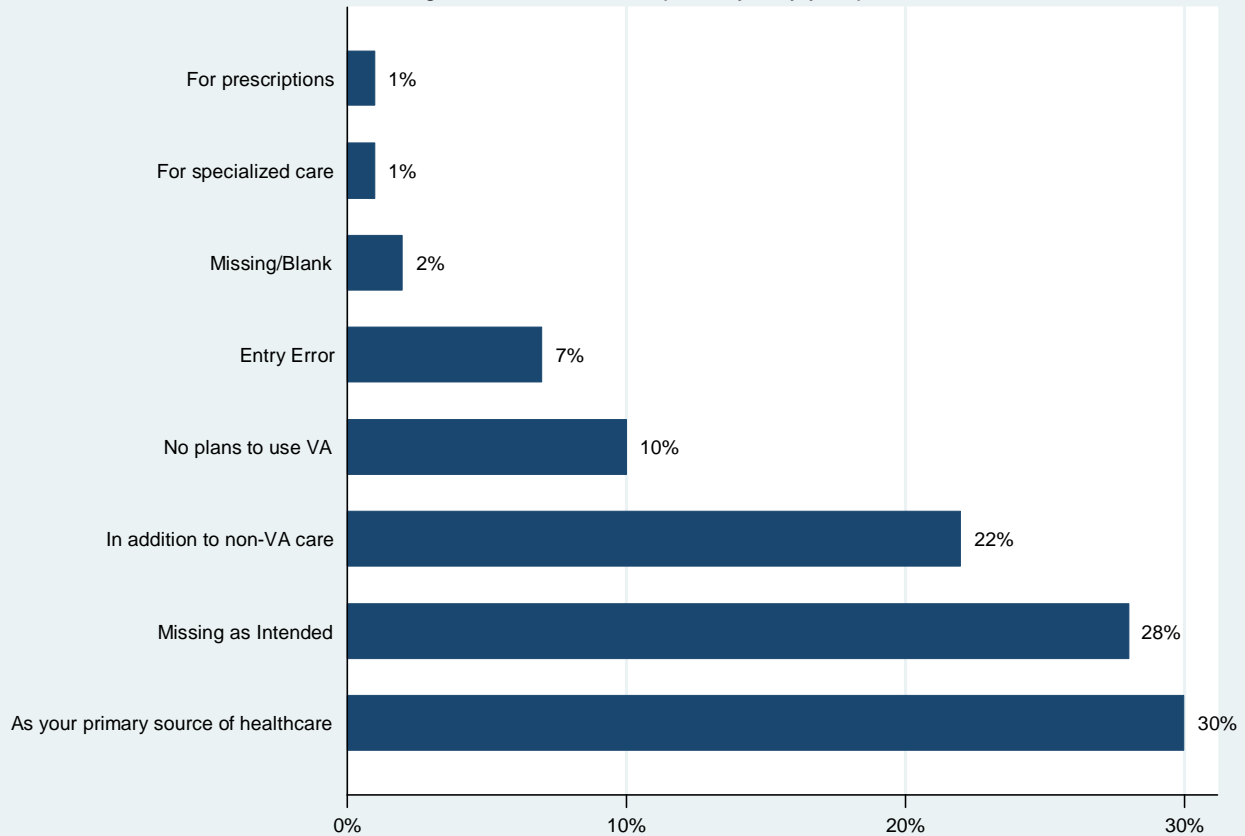
Disability Percent	VA (Dept. of Veterans Affairs)	CHAMPUS, CHAMPVA, or TRICARE (military)	Private insurance purchased directly or by a family member	Medicare, including Medigap supplement	Medicaid/ Medical Assistance	Other federal/ state/ local gov't program	Out of pocket by you or your family (co-
0%	49%	23%	0%	0%	0%	12%	0%
10% to 29%	59%	4%	9%	5%	0%	0%	2%
30% to 49%	30%	6%	5%	0%	0%	1%	0
50% to 69%	50%	1%	15%	0%	0%	0%	0%
70% or higher	48%	16%	3%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Don't know	23%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Missing/ blank	14%	0%	0%	7%	0%	0%	0%
Missing as intended	31%	5%	12%	3%	1%	0%	4%
Entry error	87%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	8%
Total	44%	7%	7%	2%	0%	1%	1%

Of the veterans responding, 54% plan to use the VA health care in the future. With 30% choosing the VA as their primary source of health services in the future (see Table 28 and Figure 12).

**Table 28. Percent of respondents by the primary way they plan to use VA in the future**

Primary Way to plan to use VA in the Future	Percent of Respondents
As your primary source of health	30%
In addition to non-VA care	22%
No plans to use VA	10%
For specialized care	1%
For prescriptions	1%
Missing as intended	28%
Entry error	7%
Missing/Blank	2%

Figure 12: What is the primary way you plan to use VA in the future?



In the prior twelve months almost half (49%) of women veterans responded that they had used women's health care services (see Table 28). The age groups of 40 to 49 years and those 50 to 59 years reported 58% and 56% respectively for their use of women's health services (see Table 29). The most frequently cited locations to obtain women's health care services were a VA primary care clinic (68%) or a women's health or gynecology clinic at a VA facility (72%) (see Table 30).

**Table 29. Percent of women respondents who have you used women's healthcare services during the past 12 Months**

Age Groups	Percent of Female Respondents
20 to 29	14%
30 to 39	32%
40 to 49	58%
50 to 59	56%
60 to 69	49%
70 to 79	
<b>Total</b>	<b>49%</b>

**Table 30. Percent of women veterans by any Location where women's health care Services were obtained during the past 12 Months**

<b>Location of where you obtained women's health care services</b>	<b>Percent of Female Respondents</b>
A primary care clinic at a VA facility	68%
A women's health clinic or gynecology clinic at a VA facility	72%
Any provider or facility outside VA, but paid for by VA	53%
Any provider or facility outside VA, not paid for by VA	11%
Any women's healthcare provider or gynecology clinic outside VA, not paid for VA	18%

## DISABILITY COMPENSATION

### INTRODUCTION

Disability Compensation as described by the US Department of Veteran Affairs is “. . . a monthly tax-free benefit paid to veterans who are at least 10% disabled because of injuries or diseases that were incurred in or aggravated during active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training. . . . The benefit amount is graduated according to the degree of the veteran's disability on a scale from 10 percent to 100 percent (in increments of 10 percent). Compensation may also be paid for disabilities that are considered related or secondary to disabilities occurring in service and for disabilities presumed to be related to circumstances of military service, even though they may arise after service. Generally, the degrees of disability specified are also designed to compensate for considerable loss of working time from exacerbations or illnesses.”<sup>15</sup>

The OVA was very interested in disabled veterans. One focus group was comprised entirely of disabled veterans. They discussed delays in the process to file disability compensation claims and the importance of insuring that active duty members have injury information included in their medical records. It is difficult to determine if veterans understand the lengthy eight step process for filing for disability compensation. They also noted that many of the Alaska veteran benefits are for disabled veterans. Veterans in both focus group related disability rating to levels of health care services and Alaska veteran benefits but they couldn't provide specifics for what of which services apply at the varied disability rating levels.

More than half of the surveyed veterans applied for disability compensation. About one third of those who have filed have a disability rating of 50% or greater. The disability compensation benefit is very to extremely important to veterans to meet their financial needs. The importance varies across age groups and is highest among young veterans - 18 to 34 years of age.

### RESULTS

One focus group was dedicated exclusively to disabled veterans. Disability was one of the screening criteria for inclusion in this focus group. From this groups' discussions it appeared that the veterans associated the disability rating with the ability to access varied levels of health services. All seem to believe this but none had clear information on which health services varied by disability rating.

The delays and the length of time it takes for a response to a disability claim was a comment among participants in both focus groups. Of note, the US Department of Veterans Affairs website states that "there are eight distinct steps that most claims for disability compensation follow. These phases may vary in time depending on the complexity of the claim.”<sup>16</sup> It didn't

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<sup>15</sup> US Department of Veterans Affairs, <http://www.benefits.va.gov/COMPENSATION/types-disability.asp>, accessed on May 20, 2015

<sup>16</sup> US Department of Veterans Affairs, Compensation, Claims Process <http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/process.asp>, accessed May 20, 2015

appear this information (number of steps and the varied length of timing) is well known among veterans. Even with the strong encouragement to submit as much information as possible with their claim to shorten to processing time, it appears that veterans need more to understand what causes the claims to take so long. There were some veterans that spoke of the loss of forms and the need to resubmit entire packets. Another shared that it took almost a year to have a claim processed, and another who spoke of the difficulties in proving that a chronic health condition (diabetes) that began during their military service and therefore should be recognized under a disability claim.

Veterans in both groups spoke of the importance of getting information related to injuries into their medical records during active duty to assist with filing of a disability claim. They shared stories of how they are passing this advice to current military members.

During the disabled veterans group, it was highlighted that many of the Alaska veteran benefits are only for disabled veterans. There again was a discussion of the disability rating and how it applies to Alaska benefits. Some in the group felt the Alaska veteran benefits should be offered to all veterans regardless of disability rating.

Among survey respondents 55% had applied for disability compensation. More than half, 51% of female and 56% male veterans responding to the survey have claimed or received VA disability compensation (see Table 31). Of those respondents who said they were receiving disability benefits a third (33%) had a disability rating of 50% or more and 21% had a rating of 70 percent or higher (see Table 32).

**Table 31. Have you ever applied for disability compensation by gender of respondent?**

Receiving or claimed or received VA Disability Compensation	Male	Female	Total
No	26%	30%	26%
Yes	56%	51%	55%

**Table 32. Percent of respondents across disability ratings conditional on receiving VA benefits**

Disability Rating	Percent of Respondents
0%	4%
10% to 29%	14%
30% to 49%	14%
50% to 69%	12%
70 % or higher	21%
Don't know	3%
Missing	28%
Entry error	2%

In 2012 per the Alaska Department of Veteran Affairs, approximately \$214 million federal dollars were provided directly to veterans residing in Alaska as disability compensation. Among our survey respondents who had filed a claim or received disability compensation, 59% are currently receiving payments (see Table 33). This represents at least 90% of each of the disability rating groups of 10% or higher (see Table 34).

**Table 33: Percent of respondents receiving monthly disability benefits  
(among those who have claimed VA benefits)**

Receiving monthly benefits for your disability	Percent of Respondents
Yes	59%
No	10%
Missing/blank	2%
Missing	28%
Entry error	2%

**Table 34. Percent of respondents receiving monthly disability payments  
by disability rating**

Disability Rating	No	Yes
0%	100%	0%
10 to 29%	10%	90%
30 to 49%	5%	92%
50 to 69%	0%	99%
70% or higher	3%	97%
Don't Know	4%	95%

Among respondents receiving payments almost half (47%) felt this compensation is "extremely" or "very important" to helping them meet their financial needs (see Table 35). For those with a disability rating of 30% or greater the importance of disability compensation is greatest (see Table 36).

**Table 35. Importance of disability payment to help meet financial needs**

Level of Importance	Percent of Respondents who are receiving VA disability payments
Extremely important	37%
Very important	10%
Moderately important	7%
Slightly important	4%
Missing/blank	2%
Missing	36%
Entry error	3%

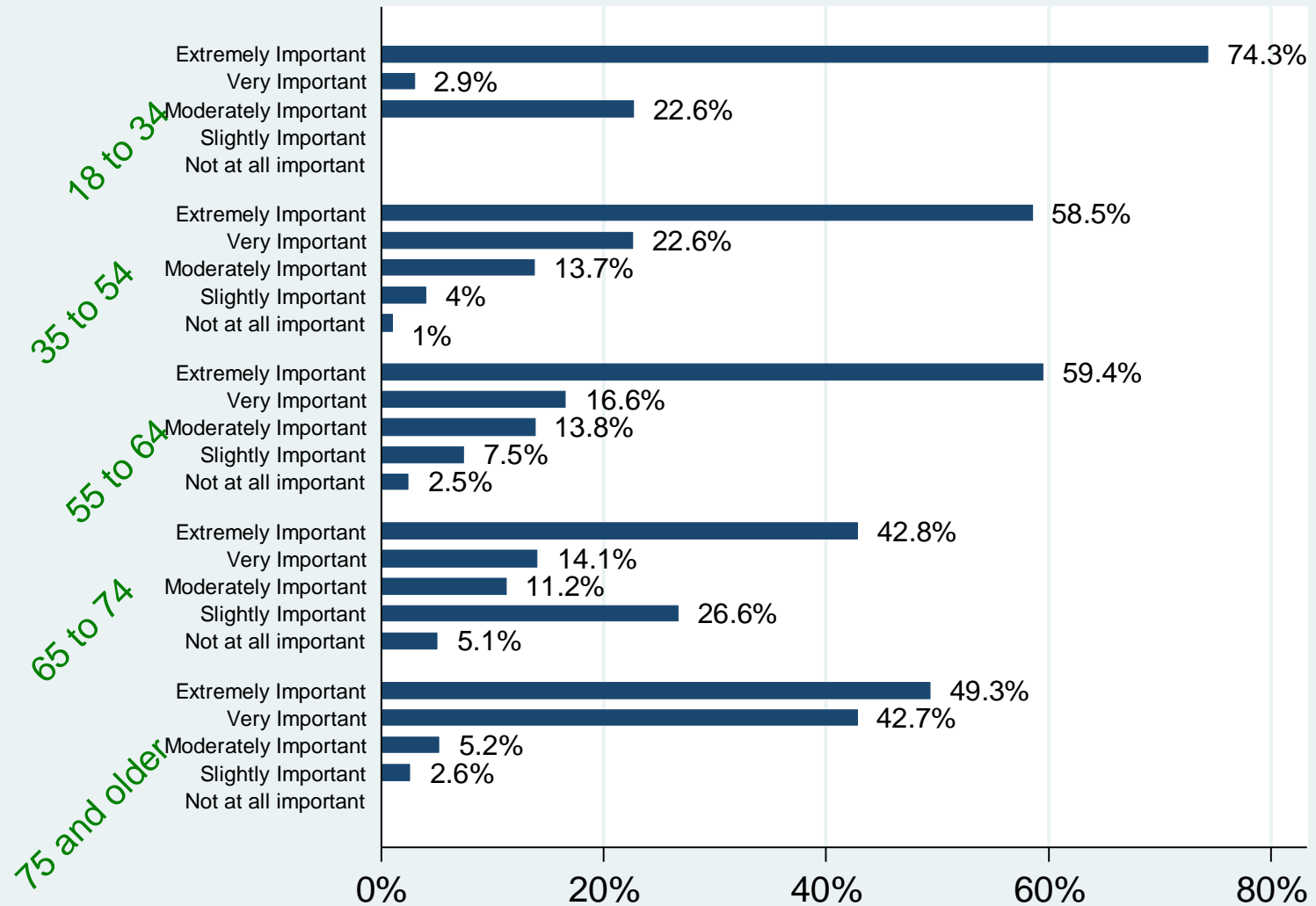
**Table 36. Importance of disability payments by respondent disability rating**

<b>Disability Rating</b>	<b>Extremely Important</b>	<b>Very Important</b>	<b>Moderately Important</b>	<b>Slightly Important</b>	<b>Not at all Important</b>
<b>10% to 29%</b>	18%	21%	25%	22%	5%
<b>30% to 49%</b>	61%	14%	11%	7%	1%
<b>50% to 69%</b>	65%	26%	6%	0%	1%
<b>70% or higher</b>	82%	10%	4%	0%	0%
<b>Don't know</b>	0%	4%	0%	0%	0.0%

The importance of payments is positively associated with disability ratings. In other words, payments are more important to veterans with higher disability ratings. This is unsurprising as the extent of the disability is likely to affect one's ability to be employed and earn wages. Figure 13 below shows that the relative importance of payments also varies across age groups with 74.3% of 18 to 34 year olds saying the disability compensation payments were "extremely important" to their financial needs and only 42.8% of 65 to 74 year olds stating the same.



Figure 13: Importance of disability payments by age groups



## EMPLOYMENT

### INTRODUCTION

Employment, education, and housing are basic needs that are provided to active duty military members. Veteran benefits related to these needs are important for the transition of military members to the demands and challenges of everyday life as civilians.

In the focus groups and the survey, we explore the relationship between the veterans' military training and the transferability of this experience to employment after military service. We also wanted to learn about employers' perception of veterans and how these perceptions affected veterans' ability to get a job. From the survey we found that about half of the veterans were employed. The majority of those who were unemployed were retired. About a quarter of survey respondents did not think the military prepared them to enter the civilian job market.

During the focus groups we learned that the timing of separation from active duty and the location of separation may have a bearing on employment opportunities. From the focus group discussions of "veterans preference," it appeared that employment related benefits didn't provide much to help veterans gain employment in civilian life. This is in contrast to the survey respondents who listed among their other choices that this preference helped them obtain employment.

Thinking about employers' willingness to hire veterans, we asked the focus group participants what they thought were employers' opinions and perceptions of veterans. Participants said some employers liked veterans because they perceive them as employees who will follow direction and are reliable. They felt some employers sought to hire veterans. This was balanced with other participants who felt some employers (mentioned were those in federal and state positions) may only interview veterans because of regulatory requirements. They felt their veteran experience helped them get an interview, but not a job.

In the focus groups, we asked the veterans to think about their employment within the five years after they left the military when thinking about job readiness. Several veterans made note that the leadership training they obtained on active duty was transferable to the civilian work force regardless of whether they had a job similar to the one in the military. About half of the participants thought that they had gained skills, training, and experience in the military that were transferable to their civilian jobs when they left active service. The other half found civilian jobs that were very different than what they had done in the military and hence did not feel their military experience was useful in obtaining a job in the civilian labor force.

Other veterans thought employers had negative stereotypes about veterans especially concerning the likelihood that veterans had post-traumatic stress disorder. One veteran talked about situational awareness in the configuration of interior space as a skill learned in the military and felt civilians might sense an "edginess in a way that makes people understand the edginess but not the why."

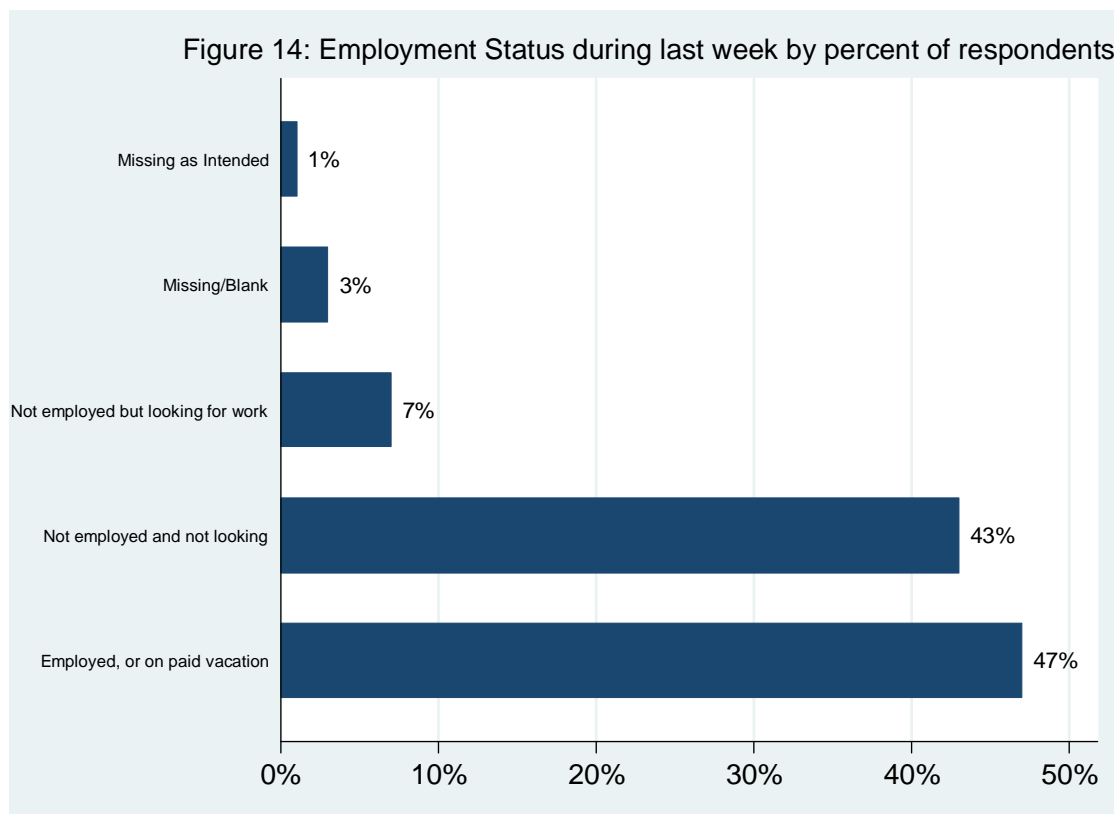
A few veterans felt that there are so many people in hiring positions that are not veterans who do not respect veterans. The participant made the analogy that “...it’s the same thing that people who don’t have college degrees and are in a hiring position because they have risen through 20 years of experience and they become a supervisor or whatever and now they are on a hiring board and they don’t respect college degrees.”

## RESULTS

First we asked veterans about their employment status. Almost half – 47% – were employed (see Table 37 and Figure14).

**Table 37. Employment status during last week by percent of respondents**

Employment Status	Percent of Respondents
Employed, or on paid vacation	47%
Not employed but looking for work	7%
Not employed and not looking	43%
Missing/Blank	3%
Missing as intended	1%

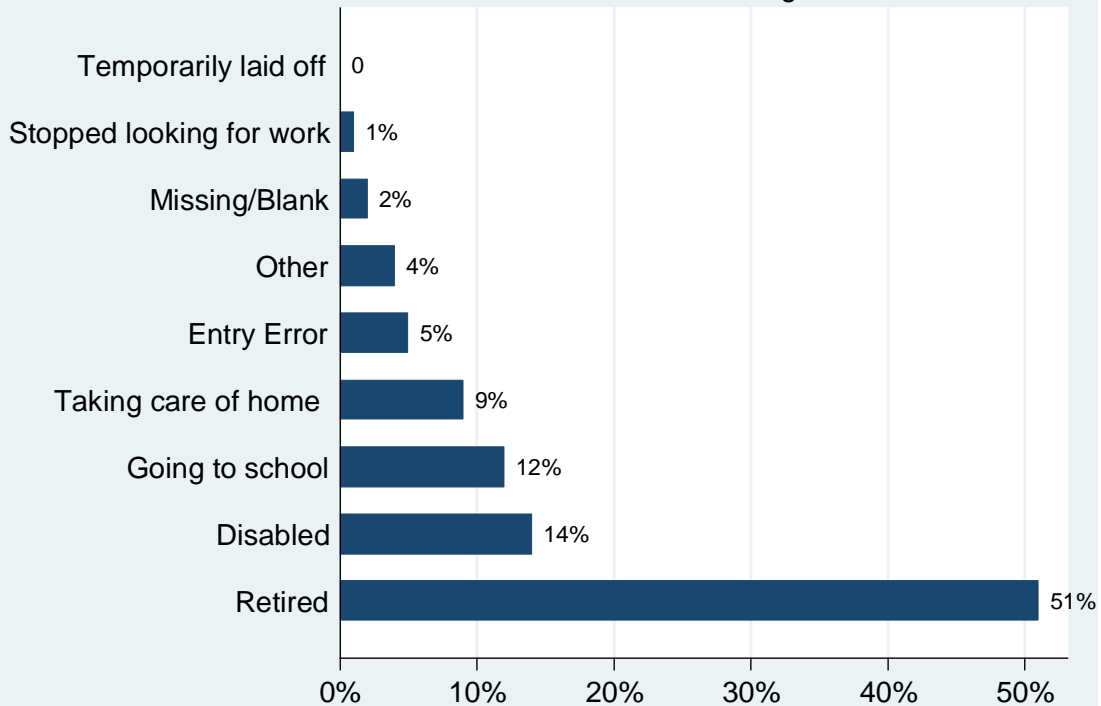


A comparable amount, 43%, was not employed or looking for work (see Table 36). When asked the main reason they were not looking for work most, 51%, were retired, with 14% disabled and another 12% going to school (see Table 38 and Figure 15).

**Table 38. Among those not employed, reasons for not looking for work**

<b>Retired</b>	<b>0.51</b>
<b>Disabled</b>	<b>0.14</b>
<b>Going to school</b>	<b>0.12</b>
<b>taking care of home</b>	<b>0.09</b>
<b>Entry Error</b>	<b>0.05</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>0.04</b>
<b>Missing/Blank</b>	<b>0.02</b>
<b>Stopped looking for work</b>	<b>0.01</b>
<b>Temporarily laid off</b>	<b>0.00</b>

**Figure 15: Among those not employed, reasons for not looking for work**

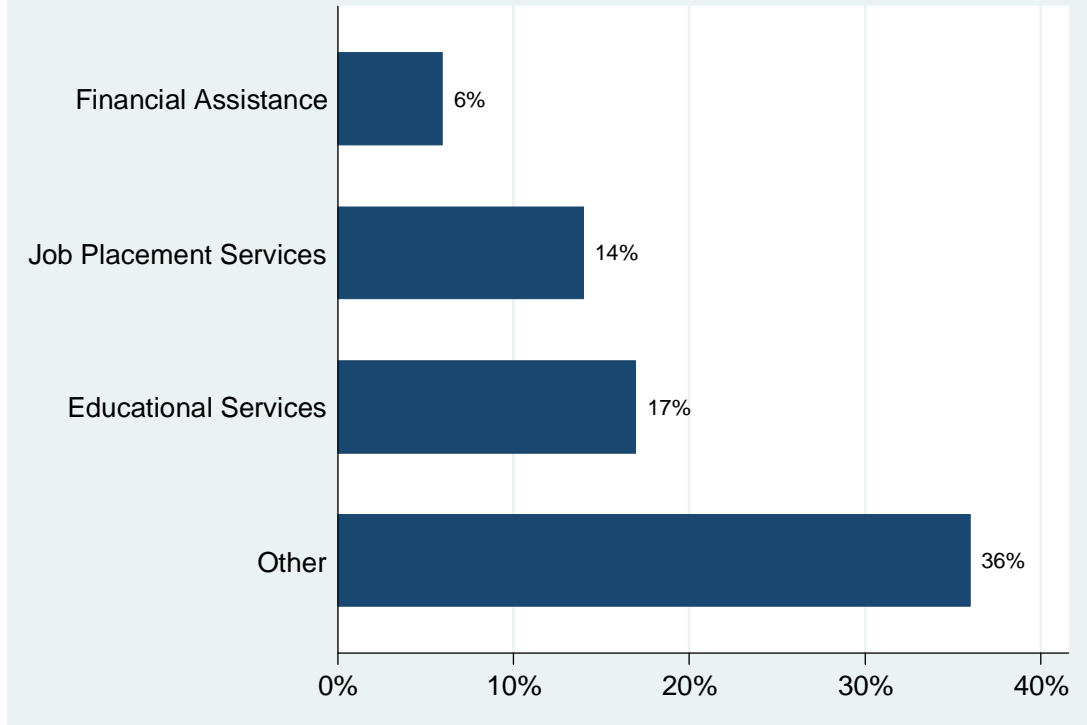


Among the veterans who had applied for or received disability compensation and were employed, we asked what VA services helped them obtain their job, educational services provided the most assistance (see Table 38 and Figure 16).

**Table 39: Services that assisted you in obtaining a job**

Service that Assisted in Obtaining a Job	Percent of Respondents
Educational services	17%
Financial assistance	6%
Job placement services	14%
Other	36%

**Figure 16: What services assisted you in obtaining a job?**



In the list that follows, we look closer at the 36% of respondents who were employed and listed “other” services that assisted them in obtaining the job. Over half clarified that they did not use any services to assist with finding a job. However, eight wrote that veteran preferences were helpful in securing employment. It is also clear veterans draw upon their networks and other less tangible skills and or resources they have acquired through their training.

List of answers from people who chose the “other” option in services used to help obtain a job.

Number of Respondents

None and Did Not Use	16
Veteran's Preference	8
Self Employed	3
My Own/Self	3
I'm using the skills I learned while I served	1
Vocational Rehabilitation	1
Apprenticeship Training	1
Networking between other veterans and Veteran Service Officers	1
Service Connected Disability	1
I am able to do part time work	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>

When asked about preparation for entry into the civilian job market, 25% of the respondents thought they were “poorly” or “very poorly” prepared (see Table 40).

**Table 40. Percent of respondents by how well prepared to enter the civilian job market (labor force)**

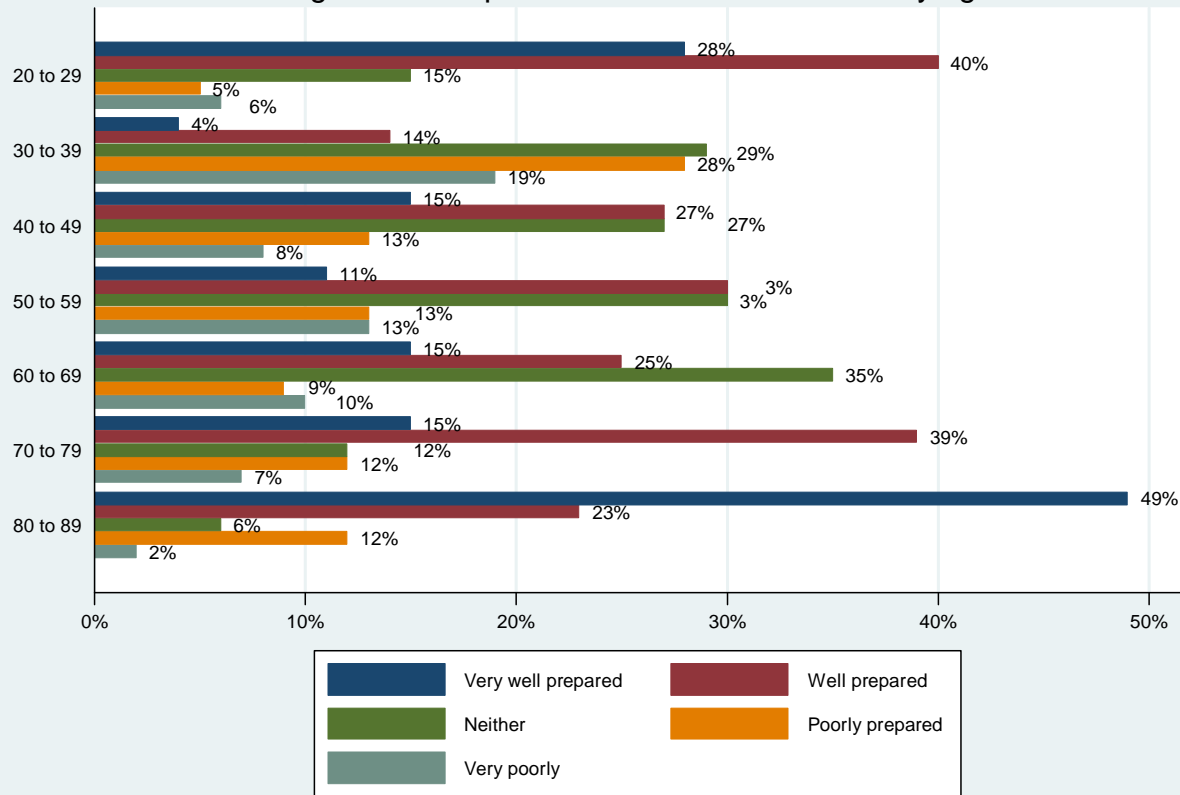
How well prepared	Percent of Respondents
Neither well nor poorly prepared	27%
Well Prepared	27%
Very well prepared	15%
Poorly prepared	13%
Very poorly prepared	12%
I was not interested in entering	2%
Not applicable	2%
Missing as intended	1%
Missing/Blank	1%

Looking more closely by age groups, veterans in the 30 to 39 and 50 to 59 age groups were the most likely to feel they were poorly and very poorly prepared (see Table 41 and Figure 17). Keep in mind that employment is influenced by the timing and the location in which the veteran is discharged. Macroeconomic conditions coupled with the individual’s area of expertise determine to a large extent the degree of success in the job market. We have veterans who have entered the workplace at vastly different points in time in arguably very different locations.

**Table 41. Preparedness for the labor force by age**

Age Groups	Very Well Prepared	Well Prepared	Neither	Poorly Prepared	Very Poorly Prepared
20 to 29	28%	40%	15%	5%	6%
30 to 39	4%	14%	29%	28%	19%
40 to 49	15%	27%	27%	13%	8%
50 to 59	11%	30%	30%	13%	13%
60 to 69	15%	25%	35%	9%	10%
70 to 79	15%	39%	12%	12%	7%
80 to 89	49%	23%	6%	6%	2%

**Figure 17: Preparedness for the labor force by age**



In our survey, we ask about training skills and experience as it relates to their most “recent” civilian job. Just shy of a third (32%) of the survey respondents said there was generally a match between their most recent civilian job and the occupations they were trained for in the military. But more than half (57%) felt there was not a match (see Table 42). Civilian jobs were limited or unavailable was the reason given by 37% of respondents for their civilian job not matching the occupation they had in the military (see Table 43).

**Table 42. Percent of respondents whose military training matched and most recent job**

Military Training Match Most Recent Job	Percent of Respondents
Yes	32%
<b>No</b>	<b>57%</b>
Have not had a civilian job	7%
Missing/Blank	2%
Missing as intended	1%
Entry error	0%

**Table 43. Percent of respondents by reason most recent civilian job doesn't match occupation trained for in the military**

Reason most recent civilian job doesn't match military occupation	Percent of Respondents
Military training was inadequate	23%
Civilian jobs were limited or unavailable	<b>37%</b>
Other	31%
Missing/Blank	7%
Entry error	2%

Of all the veterans who were employed, more than half (52%) thought their military experience, training, and skills applied a lot or some to their most recent civilian job (see Table 44).

**Table 44. Percent of respondents who thought the training, skills or experiences gained in the military apply to their recent civilian job**

How much training, skills or experiences from military apply most recent civilian job	Percent of Respondents
<b>A lot</b>	<b>30%</b>
Some	22%
A little	17%
Not at all	19%
Missing/Blank	5%
Missing as intended	8%
Entry error	0%

Veterans do take advantage of training or education to enter a new career as a civilian. Almost half, 45% of the survey respondents stated they had received training or education to enter a new career (see Table 45).



**Table 45. Percent of respondents that received training or education and entered a new career or line of work**

<b>Received Training or Education and Entered a New Career or Line of Work as a Civilian</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
<b>No</b>	42%
<b>Yes</b>	45%
<b>Missing/Blank</b>	5%
<b>Missing as intended</b>	8%
<b>Entry error</b>	0%

## EDUCATION

### INTRODUCTION

One of the key provisions of the GI bills is education and training support. There are several GI Bills. “The term GI Bill refers to any Department of Veterans Affairs education benefit earned by members of Active Duty, Selected Reserve and National Guard Armed Forces and their families. The benefit is designed to help service members and eligible veterans cover the costs associated with getting an education or training. The GI Bill has several programs and each is administrated differently -- depending on a person's eligibility and duty status.”<sup>17</sup> There are other federal programs and benefits offered including reduced costs for tuition, scholarships, education enhancement, educational support and assistance, work-study programs, on-the-job training, and more.

The state of Alaska provides veterans with access to many education benefits. Some of these are:

- The University of Alaska offers support for veterans and service members including tuition assistance, transferring credit, and evaluations of military training
- Resident tuition is available at any University of Alaska System
- In Alaska, the Department of Education and Early Development may award diplomas to WWII veterans living in Alaska as a part of Operation Recognition

In our survey, we asked veterans about the use of education or training benefits, excluding VA Vocational Rehabilitation. We find that the use of education benefits is associated with the age of the veteran. Younger veterans are more likely to have used the benefit. Younger age adults are at a stage where pursuing educational and career advancement goals is more attractive. These age differences in educational benefit usage may be related to the ability to use the educational benefits during active duty. Additionally, many veterans noted the high level of importance this benefit has played in helping them reach their educational and professional goals.

The use of the benefits during active duty may account for the small number of veterans who had comments about education benefits during the focus groups. From the few veterans who shared comments about education benefits it appears to be working well in terms of ease of application (access). There was one respondent who noted that he had timed out his use of the education benefits. Now being older and having the time they wished for a way to access VA education support.

### RESULTS

From the survey results the use of the education benefit diminished with an increase in age. In the 20 to 29 age group, 85% had used their education or training benefits. This is twice as much as any other age group except 30 to 39 year olds where a little more than half (56%) had

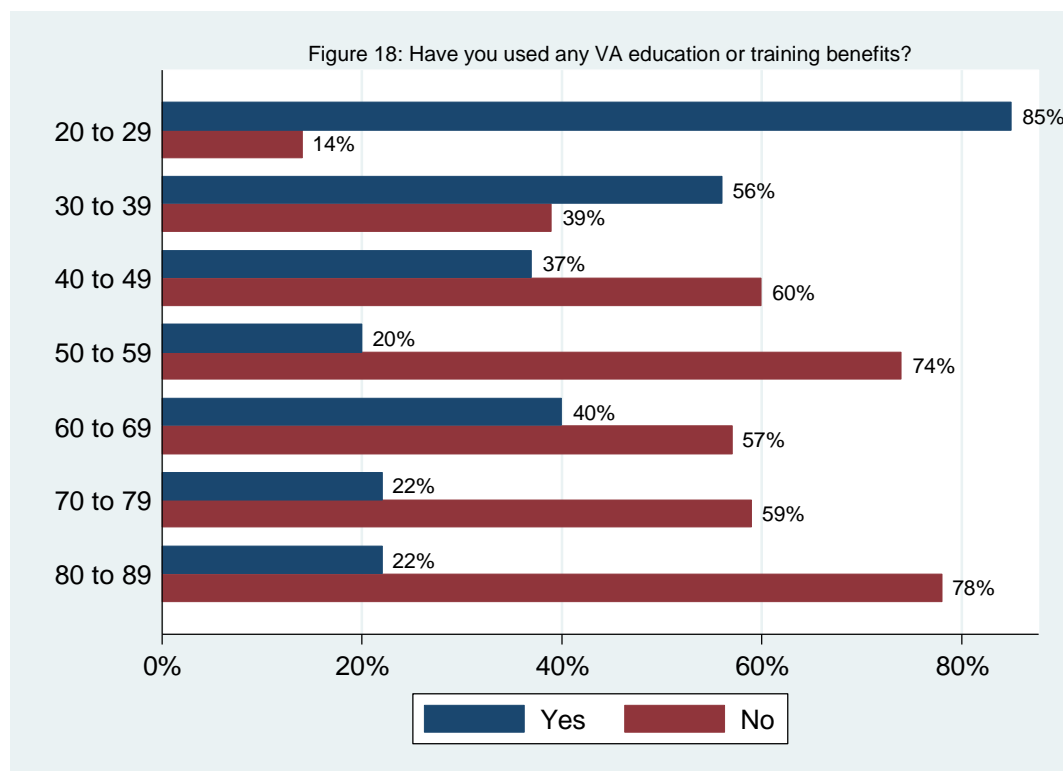
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<sup>17</sup> Military.com Education at <http://www.military.com/education/gi-bill/learn-to-use-your-gi-bill.html>, accessed on June 8, 2015

used the benefit. Of note, 40% of the 60 to 69 age group marked that they had used the education benefits. This may be reflective of the high number of Vietnam era veterans who responded to the survey (see Table 46 and Figure 18).

**Table 46. Use of any VA education or training benefit by age group**

Age Group	Yes	No
20 to 29	85%	14%
30 to 39	56%	39%
40 to 49	37%	60%
50 to 59	20%	74%
60 to 69	40%	57%
70 to 79	22%	59%
80 to 89	22%	78%
Total	37%	57%



Three quarters of female veterans ages 30 to 39 compared to a little over half of males (53.6%) used VA education and training benefits (see Table 47).

**Table 47. Use of education benefits by gender and age group**

Age Groups	Male	Female
20 to 29	84.8%	86.3%
30 to 39	53.6%	76.0%
40 to 49	37.8%	36.6%
50 to 59	19.1%	22.8%
60 to 69	41.2%	13.6%
70 to 79	21.5%	53.4%
80 to 89	22.0%	

Of survey respondents, 12% of the respondents used education benefits during and after duty, while 41% only used them after duty. In total, 86%, of respondents used their education benefits after active duty (see Table 48).

**Table 48. Percent of respondents by time of use of education benefits**

		After active duty			
		Yes	No	Missing	Total
During active duty service	Yes	12%	7%	7%	26%
	No	41%	0%	0%	41%
	Missing	32%	0%	0%	33%
	Total	86%	7%	7%	100%

For 72% of the respondents the education benefit was extremely or very important to helping them meet their educational goals or preparation for a better job (see Table 49).

**Table 49. Importance of VA education benefits in helping veterans meet educational or employment goals**

Level of Importance	Percent of Respondents
Extremely important	53%
Very important	19%
Moderately important	17%
Slightly important	5%
Not at all important	5%
Missing/Blank	0%

## HOUSING

### INTRODUCTION

The US Department of Veterans Affairs and the Alaska Office of Veteran Affairs, (OVA) assists veterans with multiple facets of the housing process. They help with the purchase of a house or land and even with lowering interest rates under certain conditions for mortgage loans.<sup>18, 19 & 20</sup> There are supportive housing services for homeless veterans and their families that include the VA National Call Center for Homeless Veterans and the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program.<sup>21</sup>

The Alaska OVAs interest in housing, as part of the needs assessment, was to focus on housing support for aging and disabled veterans. Currently, there is the Alaska Veterans and Pioneers Home in Palmer<sup>22</sup> that has 79 beds, of which 75% are designated for veterans. In Haines, Alaska, the community is developing the Soboleff-McRae Veterans Village and Wellness Center to provide housing and community health care services to veterans in one facility.<sup>23</sup>

We asked Alaska veterans to tell us about their perceptions and expectations of where they would like to receive long term care if they were no longer able to care for themselves. The questions we asked revolved around the choice of location, the composition of residents (veterans vs. non-veterans), and proximity to friends and family. Understanding these preferences can help develop a systematic approach to assist aging and disabled veterans in need of long term supportive housing.

Based on the responses we have obtained, it is mostly likely that veterans would seek out family or friends first in the event that they need long term care. It was also clear that if veterans were to reside in a long term facility, proximity to family and friends and that allowing significant family members to stay at the long term care facility are very important. Regarding the composition of residents, veterans had no preference as to whether the facility is exclusive to veterans or open to both veterans and civilians. When asked about where they would expect to access this long term care, the majority picked Anchorage as the most popular and desired location in large part due to the desire to be close to family and friends.

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<sup>18</sup> Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, Office of Veterans Affairs accessed at <http://veterans.alaska.gov/real-estate.html>, on June 5, 2015

<sup>19</sup> Military.com Benefits. Alaska State Veteran's Benefits, <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/alaska-state-veterans-benefits.html>, accessed on June 5, 2015

<sup>20</sup> Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, accessed at <http://www.ahfc.us/buy/loan-programs/vets/>, on June 5, 2015

<sup>21</sup> US Department of Veterans Affairs, accessed at <http://www.alaska.va.gov/services/homeless/index.asp>, on June 5, 2015

<sup>22</sup> Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Alaska Pioneer Homes, accessed at : <http://dhss.alaska.gov/daph/pages/palmer/default.aspx>, on June 5, 2015

<sup>23</sup> Haines' Soboleff-McRae Veterans Village and Wellness Center, <http://www.hainesveteransvillage.org/> accessed on June 5, 2015

## RESULTS

Given that our focus group participants were between the ages of 18 and 64, long term housing needs in the event that they could not care for themselves were not of paramount importance. Among participants in the focus groups, a veteran mentioned their use of the GI bill for housing to buy a house in Anchorage. They found the use of the benefit to be smooth and effective. They talked about supportive housing services and homeless veterans; and some participants counseled another who has been “couch surfing” with friends (because they are homeless).

As we previously mentioned, family and friends are important in long term housing decisions. Our survey respondents ranked being in a family or friends’ home highest (27%) among the most likely place they expect to stay for long term care if they could not care for themselves (see Table 50). Assisted living or personal care facility was the highest as the second most likely choice at 12%. The state veterans’ facility, VA health care facility, and Pioneers Home all tied as highest among the third choice at 8% each.

**Table 50. Where would you most likely expect to go to access long term care services if you couldn’t care for yourself at home?**

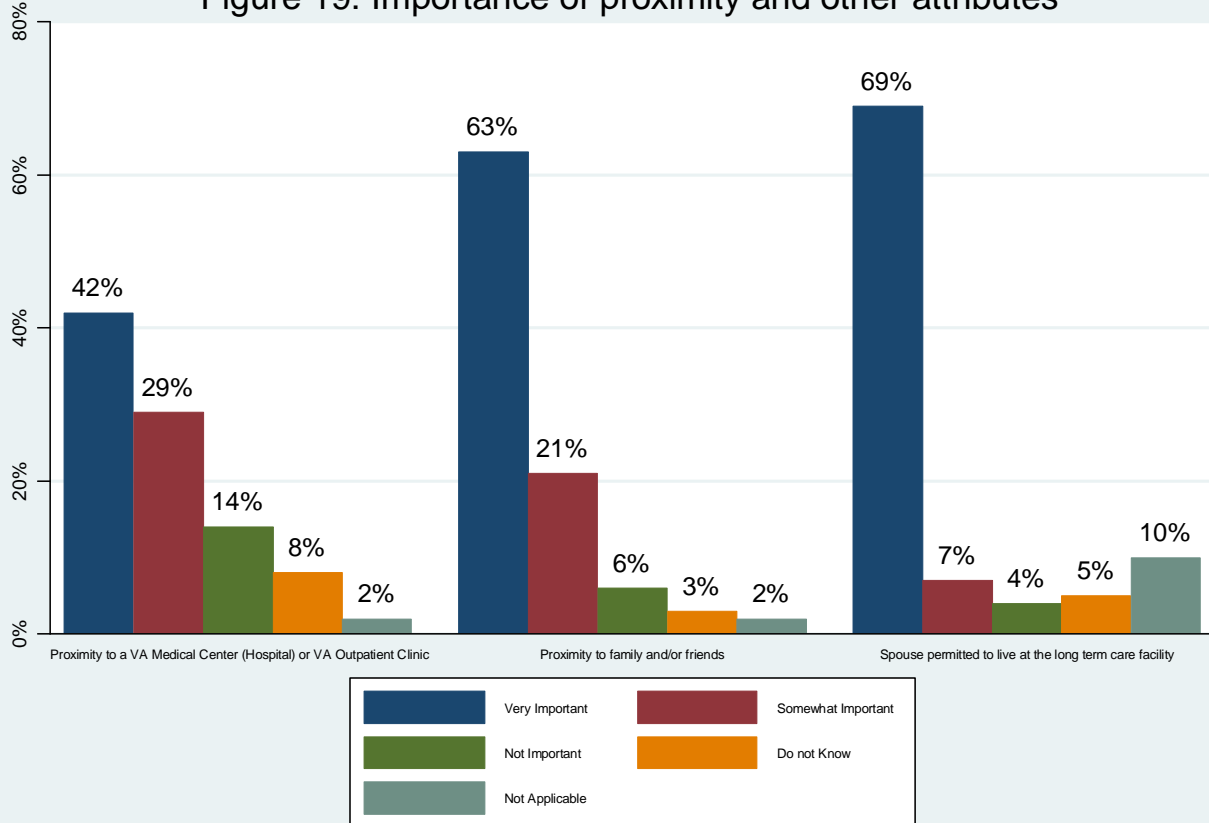
	Most Likely	Second Most Likely	Third Most Likely	Missing or Blank	Missing as Intended	Entry Error
<b>State Veterans Facility</b>	9%	10%	8%	68%	1%	3%
<b>VA Health Care Facility</b>	8%	10%	8%	69%	1%	3%
<b>Pioneers Home</b>	4%	8%	8%	75%	1%	3%
<b>Nursing Facility(located in your community)</b>	1%	3%	3%	89%	1%	2%
<b>Nursing Facility (located in some other community)</b>		1%	1%	95%	1%	2%
<b>Assisted living /Personal care facility</b>	8%	12%	7%	69%	1%	2%
<b>Retirement Housing</b>	12%	10%	6%	69%	1%	2%
<b>Family friend's house</b>	27%	8%	6%	55%	1%	2%
<b>Other</b>	4%	2%	2%	90%	1%	1%

Roughly two thirds of veterans feel it is very important for their significant other or spouse to be able to live with them (69%) or that they stay near relatives and friends (63%) in considering a location for long term care (see Table 51 and Figure 19).

**Table 51. Percent of respondents by importance of proximity**

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important	Do not Know	Not Applicable
If you couldn't care for yourself at home how important is it that your spouse/significant other also be permitted to live at the long term care facility?	69%	7%	4%	5%	10%
If you couldn't care for yourself at home how important is it that you are able to stay near family and/or friends?	63%	21%	6%	3%	2%
If you couldn't care for yourself at home how important is it that where you stay be located near a VA Medical Center (Hospital) or VA Outpatient Clinic?	42%	29%	14%	8%	2%

**Figure 19: Importance of proximity and other attributes**



More than a third (35%) of the veterans noted the maximum travel time before they felt would be too far for family and friends to where they would stay for long term care was one hour (see Table 52).

**Table 52. Maximum time travel a person is willing to travel to where you would stay**

	15 minutes	30 minutes	1 hour	2 hours	3 hours	4 hours
If you couldn't care for yourself at home, what is the maximum travel-time to where you would stay before it would be too far for family and/or friends to visit?	6%	21%	35%	17%	4%	13%

When asked to rank communities or regions where they would like to live in if they couldn't care for themselves at home, Anchorage was listed first among first and second choices. Fairbanks was second among first choice locations (see Table 53). The leading reason for the veteran's choice of location was to be close to family and friends at 43% (see Table 54).

**Table 53. Percent of respondents by region or community expect to go for long-term care**

Region/ Community	First	Second	Third
Anchorage/Matsu	62%	12%	2%
Fairbanks	13%	6%	3%
Juneau	2%	2%	6%
Southeast	0%	1%	2%
Rural Southcentral	3%	5%	1%
Southwest	1%	1%	1%
Interior	0%	2%	1%
North	0%	0%	1%
Other	11%	9%	7%

**Table 54. Reason for selecting the preferred location**

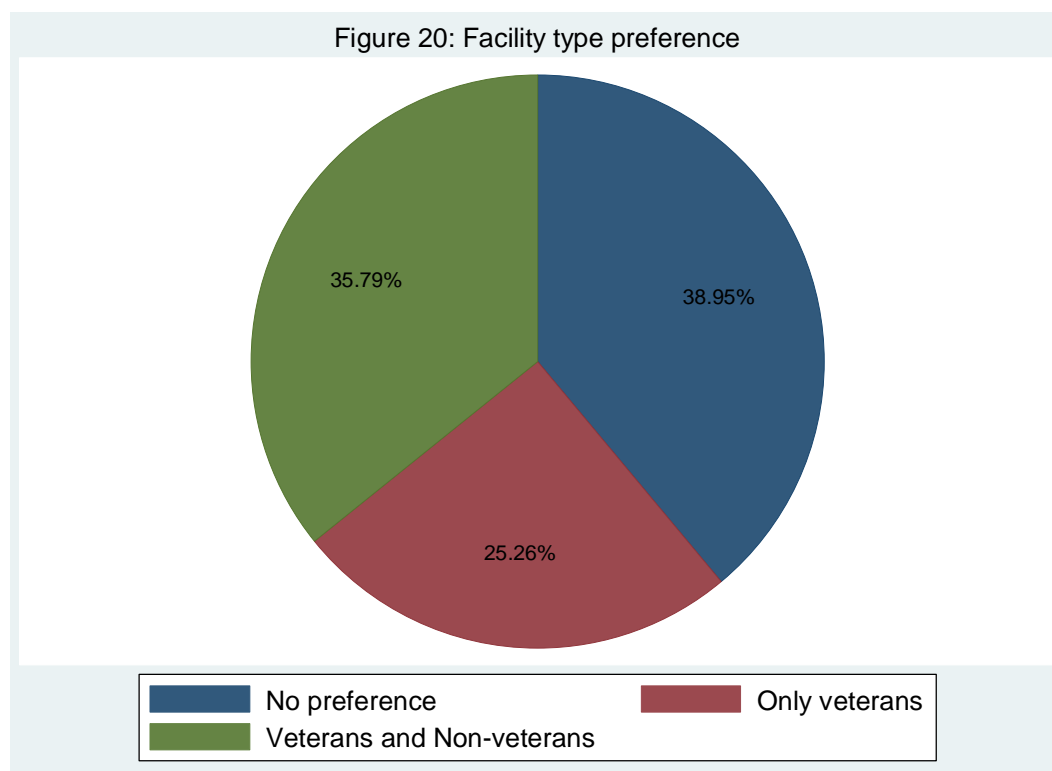
Reasons	Percent of Respondents
To be close to family and friends	43%
To access quality care services	23%
For care and family/friends	16%
Other	9%
Entry error	4%
Missing /Blank	3%
Missing as intended	1%



In our last supportive housing question we asked, “Assuming both were nearby and offered the same care at the same cost to you, which would you prefer for your own long-term care, a home that serves only veterans or a home that serves both veterans and non-veterans?” Most veterans, 71%, had no preference or preferred a combination of veterans and non-veterans (see Table 55 and Figure 20).

**Table 55. Facility preference by service to only veterans or veteran and non-veterans**

Facility serves. . .	Percent of Respondents
Only veterans	24%
Veterans and non-veterans	34%
No preference	37%
Missing/Blank	2%
Missing as intended	1%
Entry error	1%



## **RECOMMENDATION BY VETERANS ON METHODS TO INFORM THEM ABOUT THEIR BENEFITS**

The veterans who participated in the focus groups had several ideas on methods to get benefit information out to veterans.

- There is so much information given to veterans at one time about their benefits. Which benefits are of immediate interest to the veteran is usually a subset. There is a need for a mechanism to help veterans determine their immediate needs/interests and provide in-depth information. Also, perhaps target information based on the age and sex of the veterans. Veterans have different needs at different times in their lives. Targeted informational seminars at 15 or 20 minutes may meet those needs to explain in-depth only the benefits that apply to the veteran at that time. These targeted informational sessions would be followed up with regularly scheduled updates via direct mail or email providing information on the full range of veteran benefits.
- Offer annual talks about benefits or changes in benefits. Most veterans are concerned about changes in the medical program as benefits like housing and education don't change very often.
- Veterans think it would be good if the VA sent an electronic newsletter. The same way that we contacted the veterans for the survey using the Department of Motor Vehicle list, send a periodic newsletter electronically via email or through the regular mail. When the veteran gets processed into the VA they give them their email address. This maybe another source for their email addresses. The veterans commented that "if they make stars and stripes on the base why can't they send something to us once a month or say once every quarter." The addition of social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and others are seen as potentially useful.
- TV monitors in the VA facility could have programming and the various benefits programs. These would run throughout the day when open and providing services.
- Some veterans think that mail is the best thing for them because they have something physical in my hand. "Just a one page flyer to get your attention. If you, fall into this category or if you have this thing going on in your life, here's some information that can help you. Here's a point of contact. Here's where you can get more information." Perhaps once a year some sort of a flyer could be sent to all veterans.
- Written communication with veterans could be written in clearer language.

## WHAT ARE OUR CONCLUSIONS?

Veterans have an array of benefits from the VA and Alaska. Veterans learn about what services are available and how to access them from other veterans. The TAPs programs of the military services provide a good overview of the federal benefits. But it is too much information at one time for a person to be able to distinguish what is useful to them at that time. There does not appear to be a method other than the website for the veterans to learn about the Alaska benefits.

An ongoing theme among veterans is difficulties and delays in the processing of enrollment and registration for veterans benefits. Many of the veteran service organizations provide a wide variety of services – some even helping veterans with most anything they need help with – and a lot of the answers to these questions depend on which service the organization provided. Often this need is helped in submitted claims.

The mix of veterans seeking benefits changes over time. A decade ago there were more Vietnam veterans and now there is a shifting with an increase in veterans from the more recent wars. There have always been more men seeking veteran benefits but women seeking services is increasing reflecting the changing composition of the military services.

The veterans seeking services from veteran organizations tend to be in their late twenties and earlier forties and mostly male. Other individuals have served in World War II (WWII), Korean War, Vietnam, 1<sup>st</sup> Gulf War (Persian Gulf), and most recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq (Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraq Freedom (OIF), and Operation New Dawn (OND). The population of younger veterans (those in the first and recent Gulf wars) tends to be interested in education, training, and looking for employment. Older vets were looking for information on change of careers. Many of these are Vietnam veterans who have been performing physical labor and construction are looking for new careers that are less strenuous. Older vets in their 50's and above are sometimes looking for supplemental income. Some through employment and others from veterans benefit programs.

A veteran's interest and use of benefits is linked over time with their age and gender. They seek information on how to file a claim for a benefit when they need it. There is an underlining theme that veterans need additional education and information about eligibility, the services that are available and how to access them. Specifically, information potentially should be tailored to the age of the individual. Younger veterans value educational and housing benefits far more than their older counterparts. Rather than introducing every individual to the universe of benefits, an approach that takes the most immediate needs into account may be more helpful to veterans.

## **METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES FOR FOCUS GROUPS**

### **RECRUITMENT**

Alaska Office of Veterans Affairs (OVA) provided names and contact information from the Department of Motor Vehicle list for Alaskans who have a veteran designation on their driver's license to the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) for the statewide survey. Included in the survey questionnaire was a recruitment message for veterans interested in participating in focus groups. We were looking for female veterans, disabled veterans, and care givers for veterans to volunteer for a 90-minute focus group. We also used flyers distributed at organizations that provide services to veterans, messages sent via e-mail ListServes, University of Alaska email newsletter announcements, and word-of-mouth to recruit participants. Also, we obtained a toll-free telephone number so potential participants could call to ask questions about the project and to determine whether they wanted to volunteer.

From the responses we received to our recruitment message via mail and online, 70 veterans indicated that they were interested in attending a focus group or left their response unmarked and provided a telephone number for contact. Of these respondents were able to recruit and schedule six (6) females for the female veterans group and twelve disabled veterans for the disabled veterans group. There were no care givers for veterans among the individuals who were interested in participating in the focus groups so this group was dropped.

### **SCREENING AND SELECTION WITH DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE**

We tracked demographic characteristics as part of recruitment to select representatives from the groups that we identified - female veterans, disabled veterans, and care givers for veterans. The demographic questions were used to identify a cross section of the target group willing to share their experiences and opinions. Participants had to be between 18 and 64 years of age, female for the female group and disabled for the disabled veterans group. Excluded were those with a family or household member who worked for advertising, public relations, or market-research firm, a veteran's service organization or any type of company targeting veterans, or for OVA; those who had participated in a focus group in the past 6 months; or those who were not willing to share their opinions on veteran benefits.

We attempted to recruit a minimum of 12 individuals for each focus group with the expectation that no fewer than six would attend; in one instances fewer than six people attended.

### **DISCUSSION GUIDES**

A discussion guide<sup>24</sup> is an aid for the facilitator to make certain that all topics are discussed in each group. The discussion guides began with an introduction to the project, ISER, and the purpose of the focus group. During this introduction, facilitators instructed participants on how focus groups work and what to expect during the focus group and invited participants to ask

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<sup>24</sup>We reviewed discussion guides from other states reports located on the State Health Access Data Assistance Center (SHADAC) Web site. We developed questions for the discussion guides by using the questions provided by DHSS. These questions are in Appendix B. Copies of the discussions guides are in Appendix C.

questions about the process. They also advised participants that they could choose not to answer any questions. Confidentiality was explained, and all participants and researchers agreed to abide by it. Participants read and signed consent forms agreeing to participate in the group.<sup>25</sup>

#### **INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

All research at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) that includes people is reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB's main role is to ensure that the research fulfills the requirements of federal regulations that protect human volunteers in research. We submitted necessary information to the IRB, which determined that the necessary safeguards were in place, and we received approval to proceed.

#### **SPECIAL CONSIDERATION**

Our facilitators did their best to ensure that there were no distractions while the group was underway. All focus groups used three people—a facilitator, an assistant to take notes, and a third person to check people in and out of the group and to document the distribution of questionnaires and the participant supports.<sup>26</sup>

#### **DATA ANALYSIS**

We made audio digital recordings of each group and later transcribed them. A staff member also made written notes while the group was underway for use in clarifying any confusion that might occur in the transcripts. We developed coding categories based on responses to the questions asked during the focus groups; two researchers coded the eight transcriptions. Verbal responses to the questions were organized into systematic categories or codes using Atlas Ti software for qualitative analysis, and we used Excel for the quantitative analysis of the questions.

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<sup>25</sup> See Appendix for copies of the consent forms.

<sup>26</sup> Participant supports were \$25.00 gift cards calling cards which were distributed to participants at the conclusion of the groups.

## VETERANS NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

**CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:**

Mouchine Guettabi

**CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:**

Rosyland Frazier

Institute of Social & Economic Research

University of Alaska Anchorage

907-786-5432, rrfrazier@alaska.edu

### DESCRIPTION:

We have been asked by the Alaska Office of Veterans Affairs to learn what Alaska veterans know about their benefits. These focus groups will help us: gather opinions about the availability, quality, potential gaps and comprehensiveness of the available programs and services; develop a better understanding of the costs borne by and needs of veterans; and elicit recommendations and ideas for improvement. We will be asking you to share your ideas and opinions about these issues. There is no right or wrong answer to any questions – we just want to hear your thoughts. This focus group will last about 90 minutes.

### VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may stop at any time. You are free to make your own choice about being in this study or not and you may quit at any time without penalty.

### CONFIDENTIALITY:

With your permission, we will record the meeting and take notes in case the recorder doesn't work. The audio recordings are to make sure that all comments are included. Later, the information on the recordings will be typed and at the end of the study the recordings will be erased. All focus group information be kept in a locked file that is only accessible to the research team. Information from this study will never be released in a way that any participant could be identified. During the group discussion, we will only use your first name. We ask that you and other participants not share anything that was discussed during the focus group.

### BENEFITS:

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. The benefits are improving knowledge of the needs of veterans. This study will highlight the needs of veterans in Alaska.

### RISKS:

There are no known risks to you from participating in this study.

### COMPENSATION:

As a thank you for your participation, we would like to give you a \$25.00 gift card.

### CONTACT PEOPLE:

If you have any questions about this research, please contact the principal investigator listed at the top of the page. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, please contact Sharilyn Mumaw, Research Compliance Officer at 907.786.1099 or email [simumaw@uaa.alaska.edu](mailto:simumaw@uaa.alaska.edu) at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

### SIGNATURE:

Your signature on this form indicates that you have read and understand the study and voluntarily agree to participate in this focus group. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to ask them now or at any time during the study.

---

Signature of Participant

Date

**An additional copy of this consent form is provided for you to keep.**

## Focus Group Discussion Guide for 2015 Veterans Needs Assessment

### Welcome, Introduction and Consent Form (10 minutes)

#### Welcome, Introduction

Hello and welcome to our session I want to thank you for taking the time to join us in this discussion. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and this is \_\_\_\_\_, we work for the University of Alaska Anchorage.

The Alaska, Office of Veterans Affairs has hired us to learn more about the needs of veterans. We would like you to tell us about different ways you get information about veteran's benefits. We will ask questions about your experiences with benefits and services available to veterans, satisfaction with services, any challenges or difficulties accessing or obtaining benefits or services, and services you needed but did not receive.

Today, I will be asking you to share your thoughts, opinions, and, ideas. We'll go through the questions together, and I hope you will all participate.

#### Consent Form

Before we start the group, I want to review the Consent Form with you and find out if you have any questions.

*[Review the consent form. Emphasize that participation is voluntary; they may decline to answer any question or withdraw at any time without penalty. Answer all questions before proceeding. Collect the signed consent form. Leave them with a copy.]*

You were invited here today because you represent of veterans we would like to learn more about and you can help provide more in depth knowledge for veterans as a whole.

Your opinions are very important. There are **no right or wrong answers** to these questions and you may have different opinions on what is being said. We welcome all points of view, and we just **need to agree that at times we will disagree**. Please **feel free to share your thoughts** even if they are different from what others have said.

\_\_\_\_\_ will be taking notes and we will be recording this session because we don't want to miss any of your comments. It is sometimes difficult to capture in writing everything that people are saying so the recording ensures that we won't miss any of your comments. \_\_\_\_\_ will **write down what is said, but not who said it**. I assure you that the information that you share will be held in the strictest of confidence. We will only be using first names and **no names will be used in our report to protect your confidentiality**. Neither \_\_\_\_\_ nor I will share your personal information in a way that any person can be identified. We want to hear your ideas so we can

**Learn what information to present and how to present it.** Our findings and conclusions will be made public through a report to the Alaska Office of Veterans Affairs and research summaries.

*Ask if there are any questions. Ask if it's okay to turn on the recorder.*

Let's review a few ground rules

Ground rules.

- Focus group will last an hour and a half
- Group discussion, so don't wait to be called on. Please jump right in.
- At the same time, please speak one at a time so we can get your opinions on the recording. Please don't have side conversations.
- People have different ideas and experiences and may not agree. In this group we agree that we may disagree, and will not interrupt when someone else is talking.
- We have a lot to cover so I might have to change the subject or move ahead. I apologize in advance for interrupting.
- Please silence your cell phone and other electronic devices.
- You all have your food so feel free to eat.
- Again, you don't have to answer any question you're not comfortable answering. If there happen to be any thoughts or feelings or comments that you don't wish to share with the group, you are welcome to write those down on the paper we've given you and you can give the paper to Rosyland or me before you leave.

Any questions before we start? Okay, let's get started.

**Warm Up Question – (10 minutes)**

First, I'd like to go around the table. Please share your first name, the branch(es) of the military in which you served, the theatres you were deployed and what your job(s) was(were).

**Sources of Information (10 minutes)**

Okay, I would like to start by talking about how you learn about veteran's benefits. We want to learn how you currently can get complete, accurate, and understandable information about benefits and the sources you get your information from.

[Who and Where]



Where did you and how do you currently getting your information about veteran's benefits? Who do you ask or where would you go? I will write on this chart the sources you tell me you currently are using.

*[Write these sources on flip chart paper]*

[How]

How do you go about obtaining information? To what extent do your relationships with other veterans help in your obtaining information? Is it part of the culture of the relationship (friendship)? To what extent are veterans benefits a part of common knowledge among veterans?

### **New Sources of information (10 minutes)**

Now I'm going to continue with this the subject of obtaining information about benefits.

You have just told me know you are currently getting this information....How you would like to get information.

- Is there someone or someplace that you expect would give you this information that you currently can't/don't?

- Would you prefer to learn about veterans benefits from: DVDs or Blue Rays, through the mail, from the organizations that provide services to veterans (which organizations) support group, a website, joining a listserv, u-tube, or in some other way?

- If you had to identify an agency or source, who would you feel is trustworthy source for this information? Who or what would that be?

Great job. You've given me a good list of sources and explained how you access information about veterans services.

### **Reasons for not using veteran's services. Knowledge of challenges and delays (10 minutes)**

Raise your hand if you believe that you or other members of your family are currently eligible for one of the veteran benefit programs? COUNT

- o If you think you're eligible, have you signed up? COUNT
- o If you haven't signed up, what is keeping you from signing up?

What are reasons, that you and others you may know, might not use veterans benefits? (Probe: access, don't have a problem getting care without it. . .)

There are different kinds of delays and many different reasons that the provision of services may be delayed. Let's talk about the challenges you have experiences with applying for and using your veterans benefits. Please describe what caused the delay? If resolved, how that happened?

### **Employment after Military service (10 minutes)**

One of the questions in the recent Veterans needs assessment questionnaire ask about the transferability of the skills and training you gained in the military. Thinking about your employment in the first 5 years after to left active duty, how transferrable were the skills you gained in the military to your civilian employment/job? Please explain.

Thinking about that same period of after your military service, when you were looking for work what do you think employers opinion was of your military service? [Probes: What do you think were/are common employer perceptions of veterans applicants? Were employers attracted to you as a potential employee because you had performed on a job for "x" numbers of years? Were employers concerned that you may have issues from your military service that would affect your ability to perform the job?

### **Closing Questions (10 minutes)**

Let's pretend you have 30 seconds to talk with government officials about veterans benefits. What are the main points you would want to make?

Is there anything else related to the topic of veterans benefits that you would like to make before we close? Have we missed anything?

If you have comments you would like to leave in writing, please remember to leave them with \_\_\_\_\_ or me.

### **Wrap-up (10 minutes)**

I want to thank you all for your help today. We've learned a lot and will use your thoughts and ideas on veterans' benefits.

Thank you again for taking time out of your busy lives to help us. I want to thank you again for sharing your ideas. Your input has been very helpful. \_\_\_\_\_ will give you your pre-paid calling card as you leave. Please sign the sheet that says you received it.



# **Help us learn more about Veterans' Benefits**

***If you're a veteran 18 to 40 years of age and are willing  
to talk about your experiences with veterans benefits,  
we would like your input!***

---

We are looking for veterans 18 to 40 years of age to volunteer for a 90-minute focus group about benefits for Alaska veterans. In the focus group we will ask about your views on and experiences with veterans benefits. There is no right or wrong answer to these questions. People who take part will receive a light meal and a gift card.

## **Some of the questions we will ask are:**

- ✓ Why is it important to have veteran benefits?
- ✓ What are your reasons for not accessing veteran benefits?
- ✓ What difficulties or problems have you had in getting access to or using veteran benefits?

The Office of Veterans Affairs is studying Alaskans' experiences in getting veteran benefits and has funded this project. Their goal is to develop a plan that will lead to accessible benefits for more Alaskans.

## **If you have any questions, please contact:**

The Institute of Social and Economic Research at UAA at (907) 786-5432  
or by e-mail at [uaa\\_akveteranssurvey@uaa.alaska.edu](mailto:uaa_akveteranssurvey@uaa.alaska.edu)

## **METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES FOR STATEWIDE SURVEY**

The University of Alaska Anchorage's Institute of Social and Economic Research designed this study in consultation with the Alaska Office of Veterans Affairs (OVA). The OVA reviewed and approved the questions and final version of the questionnaire. Finally, respondents had the opportunity to add information on veteran benefits and to provide comments, suggestions, and feedback.

### **Methods**

The OVA provided us with a list they receive from the Alaska Division of motor vehicles for those Alaska drivers who have applied for and found eligible to display a veteran's designation on their driver's license. The sample frame included 2,384 in the Municipality of Anchorage (Eagle River and Chugiak) and the Mat-Su Borough (Palmer, Wasilla) and 561 in North Star Borough (Fairbanks and North Pole) and, Kenai Borough (Kenai, Soldotna). Approximately 80% of the Alaska veterans reside in these communities. Thus the sample frame excludes veterans who do not have a license or identification card or live outside the list communities.

### **Data Collection**

A packet was mailed or e-mailed to veterans on the list that included an introductory letter explaining the project and a copy of the questionnaire. The introductory letter explained the purpose of the study and listed options for completing the survey.

In addition to broaden our distribution several copies of the questionnaire were sent to 35 veteran service organizations with a letter from the OVA requesting they distribute or make the questionnaire available to veterans seeking their services.

Data collection occurred via on-line submission or hard copy submission. All surveys were reviewed for completeness and internal consistency. Data collection commenced on October 27, 2014 and concluded January 11, 2015.

### **Data Cleaning**

Initial data cleaning was done on two separately extracted sets of data. After datasets were cleaned on Qualtrics, they were then imported into STATA for further cleaning and analysis.

### **Limitations**

A study of this magnitude and complexity inevitably carries numerous limitations and the reader is cautioned to keep these limitations in mind.



# UAA Institute of Social and Economic Research

UNIVERSITY of ALASKA ANCHORAGE

Month \_\_, 2014

First Name Last Name  
Street Address  
City, State Zip

**ID: Alaska Veterans**

First Name Last Name,

We invite you to participate in the Alaska Veterans Needs Assessment Study. This Alaska Veterans Needs Assessment is sponsored by the Alaska Office of Veterans Affairs and its results will be used to assess the needs of Alaskan veterans aged 18-64.

Your response to this survey is very important and we appreciate your participation.

The questionnaire will take approximately 10 to 20 minutes to complete, depending on your answers. We have provided three ways in which to respond:

- ✓ Complete the survey online at: <http://www.iser.uaa.alaska.edu/Projects/akvasurvey>. Please contact us if you have trouble opening the survey link.
- ✓ Mail the completed survey to us in the enclosed postage paid envelope.
- ✓ Fax the survey to us at (907) 786-7739.

Whatever option you choose, our staff is here to help you in whatever way we can. If you need assistance, contact Rosyland Frazier at (907) 786-5432 in Anchorage, (855) 776-5432 outside of Anchorage, email at [rrfrazier@alaska.edu](mailto:rrfrazier@alaska.edu) or [uaa\\_akveteranssurvey@uaa.alaska.edu](mailto:uaa_akveteranssurvey@uaa.alaska.edu). We ask that you return the completed survey no later than November 26, 2014.

Please remember, the information you provide will be held in strict confidence as all reported data is screened to protect your identity and your responses will be combined to generate reports and publications discussing issues related to veterans' needs.

We thank you for your valuable time in providing information about veterans in Alaska.

Sincerely,

Rosyland Frazier, Research Associate  
E-mail: [rrfrazier@alaska.edu](mailto:rrfrazier@alaska.edu)



## ALASKA VETERANS NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

You can also take this survey online at: <http://www.iser.uaa.alaska.edu/Projects/akvasurvey/>

### About this Survey:

**ID: Alaska Veterans**

This Alaska Veterans Needs Assessment Survey is sponsored by Alaska Office of Veterans Affairs and its results will be used to measure the needs of Alaskan veterans aged 18-64.

There may or may not be a direct benefit to you. There are no known risks to you and no compensation for participation in the Alaska Veterans Needs Assessment. However, your participation will provide valuable information to those who provide services to veterans, such as you and others, about the challenges facing veterans in Alaska. Data obtained from the survey will be combined with other veterans' surveys and identifying information will be kept confidential.

We estimate it will take between 10 to 20 minutes to complete the survey, dependent upon your responses. You do not have to answer all the questions and may stop at any time without penalty. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Rosylnd Frazier at 907.786.5432 in Anchorage, 855.776.5432 outside of Anchorage, or email at: [uaa\\_akveteranssurvey@uaa.alaska.edu](mailto:uaa_akveteranssurvey@uaa.alaska.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Sharilyn Mumaw, Research Compliance Officer at 907.786.1099 or email [simumaw@uaa.alaska.edu](mailto:simumaw@uaa.alaska.edu).

**By completing this survey, I am indicating and acknowledging that I have read and understand the description of the study and I voluntarily agree to participate. Thank you for your consent, please continue to QUESTION 1.**

### 1. Are you:

- ☐ A veteran
- ☐ Currently on active duty
- ☐ A family member of a veteran or active duty member (*Go to page 6, Question 37*)
- ☐ Neither (*Go to page 6, Question 37*)

### 2. In general, what do you think are the three most critical needs for veterans? (*Please rank them 1-3*).

(1=most critical, 2=second most critical, 3=third most critical)

- ☐ Jobs
- ☐ Long term care/assisted living
- ☐ Home purchase
- ☐ Health Care
- ☐ Learning about available benefits
- ☐ Homeless veterans
- ☐ Dealing with military sexual trauma
- ☐ Dealing with substance abuse
- ☐ Training or Education
- ☐ Finding mental health services
- ☐ Trying to figure out how to apply for benefits
- ☐ None
- ☐ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**IF YOU ARE NOT A VETERAN OR YOU ARE CURRENTLY ON ACTIVE DUTY PLEASE SKIP TO DEMOGRAPHICS PAGE 6 QUESTION 37.**

## FOR VETERANS ONLY

### FAMILIARITY WITH VA BENEFITS

**3. Are you now receiving, or have you ever, claimed or received VA benefits?**

- ☐ Yes (*Go to Question 5*)
- ☐ No (*Go to Question 4*)

**4. If you answered No to question 3, check the statement that most closely describes why you never filed for VA benefits:**

- ☐ I didn't know about veterans' benefits.
- ☐ I knew about VA benefits but didn't know how to file or where to obtain claims assistance.
- ☐ I knew about VA benefits but didn't have the transportation to get to an assistance center.
- ☐ I knew about VA benefits but didn't feel I was eligible.
- ☐ I knew about VA benefits but chose not to file.
- ☐ Disabilities prevented me from seeking claims assistance.
- ☐ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

## FOR VETERANS ONLY

5. If you answered **Yes** to question 3, please indicate which Federal or State VA benefits you are aware of or have ever claimed. Check all that apply. A brief description of these benefits is provided in the **Glossary of Benefits** on Pages 7-8.

Federal (USDVA) Benefits	I've claimed this benefit	I'm aware of this benefit but have not claimed it	I was not aware of this benefit
a. VA Health Care			
b. VA Life Insurance			
c. VA Home Loans (Home Loan Guaranty)			
d. VA Education and Training			
e. Employment Services			
f. VA Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E)			
g. VA Burial and Memorial Benefits			
h. VA Disability Compensation			
i. VA Benefits for Dependents and Survivors Health Care			
j. VA Dependents and Survivors Benefits			
k. VA Transition Assistance			
l. VA Pension			
m. Special Groups of Veterans			
n. Appeals of VA			
o. Military Medals and Records			
<b>Alaska State Benefits</b>			
<i>Jobs/Employment</i>			
aa. Employment Preference Rights			
bb. Veterans Employment Services			
cc. Affirmative Action Plan			
dd. Recording Veterans Report of Separation Form			
ee. Military Credit Towards State Retirement			
<i>Education</i>			
ff. Education Benefits			
gg. Free Tuition for Spouse or Dependent of Armed Services Member			
<i>Property</i>			
hh. Veterans Land/Discount/Purchase Preference			
ii. Property Exemptions			
jj. Veterans Housing and Residential Loans			
<i>Permits, Plates, and Passes</i>			
kk. Disabled Veterans Parking Permits			
ll. Veterans License Plates			
mm. Veteran Disabled Plates			
nn. Hunting and Fishing Licenses			
oo. State Camping Pass			
pp. Alaska Marine Highway Pass			
qq. Veterans Drivers License			
<i>Other</i>			
rr. Birthday Cards from the Governor			
ss. Please specify: _____			

## FOR VETERANS ONLY

### DISABILITY AND VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

**Have you ever applied for VA disability compensation benefits?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (*Go to Health Care Services page 3, Question 13*)

**6. What is the status of your most recent claim application?**

- ☐ Approved
- ☐ Waiting for decision from VA regional office
- ☐ Waiting for decision from the board of appeals
- ☐ Denied
- ☐ Don't know

**7. What is your current VA service-connected disability rating?**

- ☐ 0 percent
- ☐ 10 or 29 percent
- ☐ 30 to 49 percent
- ☐ 50 to 69 percent
- ☐ 70 percent or higher
- ☐ Don't know

**8. Has your VA service-connected disability ever prevented you from getting or holding a job?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**9. Are you currently receiving monthly disability payments from VA? (*If no, skip to question 11*)**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**10. During the past year, how important was the disability payment benefit you received from VA in helping you meet your financial needs?**

- ☐ Extremely important
- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Moderately important
- ☐ Slightly important
- ☐ Not at all important

**11. How important were VA vocational rehabilitation services in helping you meet employment goals or in helping you get a job?**

- ☐ Extremely important
- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Moderately important
- ☐ Slightly important
- ☐ Not at all important

**12. If you are employed, what VA services were helpful to you in obtaining a job? (*Mark all that apply.*)**

- ☐ Educational services
- ☐ Financial assistance
- ☐ Job placement services
- ☐ Not employed
- ☐ Other: Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

### HEALTH CARE SERVICES

**Have you ever applied for VA health care services?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (*Go to Education and Training page 4, Question 18*)

**13. In the last 6 months, did you use any VA health care services, or did you have any of your health care paid for by VA?**

- ☐ Yes – I received services at VA, or they were paid for by VA (*Go to Question 14*)
- ☐ No – I received services, but not from VA and were not paid for by VA (*Go to Question 15*)
- ☐ No – I did not receive any health care services (*Go to Question 15*)
- ☐ Don't know/Don't remember (*Go to Question 15*)

<b>14. What source or sources provided the financial support for that care?</b>	<b>Mark <u>all</u> that apply</b>	<b>Mark <u>one</u> as primary source</b>
VA (Department of Veterans Affairs)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CHAMPUS, CHAMPVA, or TRICARE (military)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Medicare, including Medigap supplement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Medicaid/Medical Assistance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other federal/state/local gov't program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Private insurance purchased directly or by a family member, through a union, or from a current or former employer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Out of pocket by you or your family (co-payment)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other source _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>



## FOR VETERANS ONLY

**15. What is the primary way you plan to use VA health care in the future?**

- ☐ As your primary source of health care
- ☐ In addition to non-VA care for some services (A "safety net" to use only if I lose other sources of health care)
- ☐ For prescriptions
- ☐ For specialized care
- ☐ No plans to use VA for health care

### WOMEN ONLY

**PLEASE ANSWER QUESTIONS 16 & 17**

### MEN

**16. During the past 12 months, have you used women's health care services, for example, for pap smears or prenatal care from VA or other providers?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**17. During the past 12 months, have you received women's health care services at any of the following? Mark one box for each item listed below.**

	Yes	No
a. A primary care clinic at a VA facility	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. A women's health clinic or gynecology clinic at a VA facility	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Any provider or facility outside VA, but paid for by VA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Any provider or facility outside VA, not paid for by VA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Any women's healthcare provider or gynecology clinic outside VA, not paid for by VA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

**18. Have you used any VA Education or Training benefits, excluding VA Vocational Rehabilitation?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (*Go to Employment Question 21.*)

**19. Please indicate when you used the VA education and training benefits. (Mark all that apply.)**

- ☐ During active duty service
- ☐ After active duty service

**20. How important were your VA education benefits in helping you meet your educational goals or preparing you to get a better job?**

- ☐ Extremely important
- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Moderately important
- ☐ Slightly important
- ☐ Not at all important

## EMPLOYMENT

**21. During the last week, were you:**

- ☐ Employed, or on paid vacation or sick leave from work (*Go to Question 22*)
- ☐ Not Employed, but looking for work (*Go to Question 22*)
- ☐ Not Employed and not looking for work (*Go to Question 21a*)

**21a. What is the main reason you were not looking for work?**

- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Disabled
- ☐ Stopped looking for work because you could not find work
- ☐ Temporarily laid off from work
- ☐ Taking care of your home and family
- ☐ Going to school
- ☐ Other: Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**22. When you left the Service, how well prepared were you to enter the civilian job market?**

- ☐ Very well prepared
- ☐ Well prepared
- ☐ Neither well nor poorly prepared
- ☐ Poorly prepared
- ☐ Very poorly prepared
- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ I was not interested in entering the civilian job market

## FOR VETERANS ONLY

**23. Does your most recent civilian job generally match the occupations you were trained for while you were in the military?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (*Go to 23a*)
- ☐ Have not had any civilian jobs (*Go to HOUSING, Question 26*)

**23a.** *Your most recent civilian job doesn't match the occupation you trained for in the military because ...*

- ☐ Military training I received was inadequate for the occupation in the civilian job market
- ☐ Civilian jobs within your field of military training were limited or unavailable at the time
- ☐ Other, please specific \_\_\_\_\_

**24. How much did the training, skills or experiences you gained in the military apply to your most recent civilian job?**

- ☐ A lot
- ☐ Some
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Not at all

**25. Have you received training or education and entered a new career or line of work as a civilian?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

### HOUSING

**26. If you couldn't care for yourself at home, where would you most likely expect to go to access long-term care services? (Please chose three and rank them 1-3).**

(1=most likely, 2=second very likely, 3=third likely)

- \_\_\_ State Veterans Facility
- \_\_\_ VA health care facility
- \_\_\_ Pioneers Home
- \_\_\_ Nursing Facility- Located in your community
- \_\_\_ Nursing Facility- Located in another community
- \_\_\_ Assisted Living/Personal Care Facility
- \_\_\_ Retirement Housing
- \_\_\_ Family/Friend's House
- \_\_\_ Other please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Don't know

**If you couldn't care for yourself at home, how important is it that:**

	Very	Somewhat	Not	Do not know	Not Applicable
<b>27. your spouse/significant other also be permitted to live at the long term care facility?</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>28. you are able to stay near family and/or friends?</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>29. where you stay be located near a VA Medical Center (Hospital) or VA Outpatient Clinic?</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**30. If you couldn't care for yourself at home, what is the maximum travel-time, to where you would stay, before it would be too far for family and/or friends to visit?**

- ☐ 15 minutes
- ☐ 30 minutes
- ☐ 1 hour
- ☐ 2 hours
- ☐ 3 hours
- ☐ 4 hours

**30a. What is the maximum cost of travel which would be too much for family and friends to visit?**

- ☐ \$100 - \$200
- ☐ \$201 - \$300
- ☐ \$301 - \$400
- ☐ \$401 - \$500
- ☐ \$501 - \$600
- ☐ Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**31. If you couldn't care for yourself at home, where would you most likely expect to go to access long-term care services? If there is more than one region/community, please indicate which would be your first, second or third choice in relocating.**

- \_\_\_ Anchorage/MatSu \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Fairbanks \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Juneau \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Southeast \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Other community in Alaska or outside, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Rural Southcentral \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Southwest \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Interior \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ North \_\_\_\_\_

## FOR VETERANS ONLY

**31a. What is the reason for the answer you selected in question 31?**

- ☐ To access quality care services
- ☐ To be close to family and/or friends
- ☐ For care and family/friends
- ☐ Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**32. Assuming both were nearby and offered the same care at the same cost to you, which would you prefer for your own long-term care, a home that serves only veterans or a home that serves both veterans and non-veterans?**

- ☐ Only veterans
- ☐ Veterans and non-veterans
- ☐ No preference

**33. In which branch or branches did you serve on active duty? (Mark all that apply).**

- ☐ Army
- ☐ Navy
- ☐ Air Force
- ☐ Marine Corps
- ☐ Coast Guard
- ☐ National Guard
- ☐ Reserves

**34. When did you serve on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces? (Mark all that apply).**

- ☐ Sept. 2001 or later
- ☐ Aug. 1990 to Aug. 2001 (includes Persian Gulf War)
- ☐ May 1975 to July 1990
- ☐ Vietnam era (Aug. 1964 to May 1975)
- ☐ Feb. 1955 to July 1964
- ☐ Korean War (July 1950 to Jan. 1955)
- ☐ Jan. 1947 to June 1950
- ☐ December 1946 or earlier

**35. Were you deployed to a war zone during your active duty?**

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

**35a. What theatre(s) or combat area(s)?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**36. What was your rank at the time of discharge?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## DEMOGRAPHICS

**37. What is your age?** \_\_\_\_\_

**38. What is your gender?**

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other

**39. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?**

- ☐ Less than high school
- ☐ High school diploma / GED
- ☐ Some college credit, but less than 1 year of college credit
- ☐ 1 or more years of college credit, no degree
- ☐ Associate's degree (for example, AA, AS)
- ☐ Bachelor's degree (for example, BA, BS)
- ☐ Master's degree (for example, MA, MS, MEd, MEd, MSW, MBA)
- ☐ Professional degree beyond a bachelor's degree (for example, MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD) Doctorate degree (for example, PhD, EdD)

**40. What is your current marital status?**

- ☐ Married
- ☐ Widowed
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Separated
- ☐ Never Married
- ☐ Civil Commitment or Union

**41. Do you live alone or with others currently?**

- ☐ Alone
  - ☐ With other adults or children
- 41a. How many other adults? \_\_\_\_\_
- 41b. How many children under 18? \_\_\_\_\_

**42. What is your five digit zip code?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**43. Which income range category represents the total combined income of all those living at this address during the past 12 months?**

(This includes income from all sources)

- ☐ Less than \$5,000
- ☐ \$5,000 to \$9,999
- ☐ \$10,000 to \$19,999
- ☐ \$20,000 to \$29,999
- ☐ \$30,000 to \$39,999
- ☐ \$40,000 to \$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000 to \$59,999
- ☐ \$60,000 to \$74,999
- ☐ \$75,000 to \$99,999
- ☐ \$100,000 to \$149,999
- ☐ \$150,000 or more

**44. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?**

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## Thank You!

**The Institute of Social and Economic Research and the Alaska Office of Veterans Affairs would like to thank you for completing this survey.**

**By doing so, you will be helping to better serve Alaska's veterans.**

### Glossary of Benefits

#### Federal Benefits

<b>a. VA Health Care</b>	<i>VA operates the nation's largest integrated health care system with more than 1,500 sites of care, including hospitals, community clinics, community living centers, domiciliaries, readjustment counseling centers, and various other facilities.</i>
<b>b. VA Life Insurance</b>	<i>Service members' Group Life Insurance, Veterans' Group Life Insurance, Accelerated Death Benefits, Service Disabled Veterans' Insurance, Veterans' Mortgage Life Insurance, and other insurance information as applied to World War II, Korean, and Vietnam-era Veterans and any Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance policies.</i>
<b>c. VA Home Loans (Home Loan Guaranty)</b>	<i>VA home loan guaranties are issued to help eligible Service members, Veterans, Reservists, National Guard members and certain unmarried surviving spouses obtain homes, condominiums, and manufactured homes, and to refinance loans.</i>
<b>d. VA Education and Training</b>	<i>VA educational and training benefits such as Post-9/11 GI Bill, Montgomery GI Bill, Veterans Educational Assistance Program.</i>
<b>e. Employment services</b>	<i>The Department of Veterans Affairs provides Veterans with employment and transition assistance through the VetSuccess.gov Website. VetSuccess.gov is a Veteran-centric tool, providing a number of employment and transition resources.</i>
<b>f. VA Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&amp;E)</b>	<i>sometimes referred to as the Chapter 31 program. VR&amp;E provides services to eligible Service members and Veterans with service-connected disabilities to help them prepare for, obtain, and maintain suitable employment or achieve independence in daily living.</i>
<b>g. VA Burial and Memorial Benefits</b>	<i>Burial in VA National Cemeteries, Headstones, Markers, and Medallions, and Other Memorialization.</i>
<b>h. VA Disability Compensation</b>	<i>Disability compensation is a monetary benefit paid to Veterans who are disabled by an injury or illness that was incurred or aggravated during active military service. These disabilities are considered to be service connected.</i>
<b>i. VA Benefits for Dependents and Survivors Health Care</b>	<i>Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA). Under CHAMPVA, certain dependents and survivors can receive reimbursement for most medical expenses – inpatient, outpatient, mental health, prescription medication, skilled nursing care and durable medical equipment.</i>
<b>j. VA Dependents and Survivors Benefits</b>	<i>Death Gratuity Payment; Dependency and Indemnity Compensation; Aid and Attendance Housebound Benefits; Survivors Pension; Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance; Other Benefits for Survivors such as VA Home Loan Guaranty, "No-Fee" Passports, and Burial and Memorial Benefits for Survivors.</i>
<b>k. VA Transition Assistance</b>	<i>Joint Transition Assistance; Transition From Military to VA; eBenefits; VOW to Hire Heroes; The in Transition; Pre-Discharge Program; Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES); Federal Recovery Coordination Program; Military Services Provide Pre-Separation Counseling; Verification of Military Experience and Training; Transition Bulletin Board; DoD Transportal; Educational and Vocational Counseling; Veterans' Workforce Investment Program; State Employment Services; Veterans Preference for Federal Jobs; Small Businesses.</i>
<b>l. VA Pension</b>	<i>Low-income wartime Veterans may qualify for pension if they meet certain service, income and net worth limits set by law; are age 65 or older, permanently and totally disabled, a patient in a nursing home receiving skilled nursing care, receiving Social Security Disability Insurance, or receiving Supplemental Security Income.</i>
<b>m. Special Groups of Veterans</b>	<i>Homeless Veterans; Filipino Veterans; VA Benefits for Veterans Living Overseas; World War II Era Merchant Marine Seaman; Allied Veterans Who Served During WWI or WWII; World War Service by Particular Groups; Incarcerated Veterans.</i>
<b>n. Appeals of VA Claims Decisions</b>	<i>Veterans and other claimants for VA benefits have the right to appeal decisions made by a VA regional office, medical center or National Cemetery Administration (NCA) office.</i>
<b>o. Military Medals and Records</b>	<i>Replacing Military Medals; Correcting Military Records; Review of Discharge from Military Service; Physical Disability Board of Review.</i>

<b>Alaska State Benefits</b>	
<b>Jobs/Employment</b>	
<b>aa. Employment Preference Rights</b>	<i>Veterans who possess the necessary qualifications for a given state job classification and served on active duty and received an honorable or general discharge during the dates listed on the employment application, are eligible for a state employment hiring preference.</i>
<b>bb. Veterans Employment Services</b>	<i>The Veterans Services Section, a sub-division of the State of Alaska Labor and Workforce Development Department emphasizes job placement, job matching and referral, vocational counseling, and job search assistance.</i>
<b>cc. Affirmative Action Plan</b>	<i>The State of Alaska 1998 Affirmative Action Plan affords all present and prospective state employees in the executive branch an equal opportunity for employment regardless of their veterans status - among many other factors.</i>
<b>dd. Recording Veterans Report of Separation Form</b>	<i>A veteran may record, without fee, the original or a certified copy of his or her Armed Forces Report of Separation (DD-214 Form) at any State Recorder's office of the Department of Natural Resources.</i>
<b>ee. Military Credit Towards State Retirement</b>	<i>Certain members of the various state retirement programs may be eligible for additional credit for up to five years military service.</i>
<b>Education</b>	
<b>ff. Education Benefits</b>	<i>The state provides funds to assist National Guard and Naval Militia members to obtain post-secondary educational degrees.</i>
<b>gg. Free Tuition for Spouse or Dependent of Armed Services Member</b>	<i>The spouse or dependent of an armed services member who died in the line of duty or who died as a result of injuries sustained while in the line of duty or who was listed by the Department of Defense as a Prisoner of War or as Missing in Action is entitled to a waiver of undergraduate tuition and fees; the students must be in good standing in a state supported educational institution in Alaska.</i>
<b>Property</b>	
<b>hh. Veterans land/Discount/Purchase Preference</b>	<i>The Veterans Land Discount program allows certain veterans a 25% discount on the purchase price of state residential/recreational land. Under the Veterans Land Sale Preference, before offering to the general public any unoccupied residential land by auction, a veteran has the exclusive opportunity purchase the land at a restricted sale at fair appraised market value.</i>
<b>ii. Property Exemptions</b>	<i>Real property owned and occupied as the primary residence and permanent place of abode by a qualified disabled veteran whose disability was incurred or aggravated in the line of duty and whose disability has been rated as 50 percent or more by the military service or the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, is exempt from taxation on the first \$150,000.00 of assessed valuation.</i>
<b>jj. Veterans Housing and Residential Loans</b>	<i>The Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) administers the Veterans Mortgage Program which offers financing for qualified veterans at lower interest rates. AHFC also offers a Veterans Interest Rate Preference, in which a veteran receives a one percent lower interest rate on the first \$30,000 of a bank loan when purchasing a new home. AHFC grants a preference to veterans for the rent or sale of a portion of its low cost housing projects units.</i>
<b>Permits, Plates, and Passes</b>	
<b>kk. Disabled Veterans Parking Permits</b>	<i>Disabled Parking Permits are also obtained from the DMV, available to persons at least 50 % disabled or medically handicapped, including persons disabled in the line of duty while serving in the Alaska Territorial Guard.</i>
<b>ll. Veterans License Plates</b>	<i>The State Legislature has designated several special license plates for veterans, recipients of the Purple Heart Medal, veterans who have been a Prisoner of War (POW) or veterans who are survivors of Pearl Harbor.</i>
<b>mm. Veteran Disabled Plates</b>	<i>A person who qualifies for 50% disability may apply for a disabled veteran plate and may register one vehicle with these special plates and is not subject to Motor Vehicle Registration Taxes or registration fees</i>
<b>nn. Hunting and Fishing Licenses</b>	<i>Disabled Veteran resident hunting and sport fishing licenses are available at no charge to honorably discharged veterans with a 50 percent or greater service-connected disability and Alaska residency.</i>
<b>oo. State Camping Pass</b>	<i>The legislature granted Disabled Alaskan Veterans (DAV) the right to receive one Alaska State Park Camping Pass free of charge. The DAV Camping Pass, which is valid in all developed Alaska State Park campgrounds, is good for two years.</i>
<b>pp. Alaska Marine Highway Pass</b>	<i>A one-year pass on the ferries of the Alaska Marine Highway is available for veterans having a service-related disability.</i>
<b>qq. Alaska Drivers License</b>	<i>Veterans are entitled to have their veteran status noted on their Alaska Drivers License or ID Card.</i>
<b>Other</b>	
<b>rr. Birthday Cards from the Governor</b>	<i>Birthday greetings from the Governor are available to veterans 80 years and older.</i>

## **METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES FOR KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS**

While the identification of key informants is not random, selected individuals must be able to provide well-informed perspectives about the study topic, be fairly representative of the various groups in the study population, and provide a diversity of perspectives. The Office of Veterans Affairs provided names and contact information of people who are knowledgeable and working for organizations that serve Alaska veterans. ISER researchers spoke with these individuals to gain an understanding from a variety of informed perspectives about Alaska's veterans and the services they are eligible for and use.

### **METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES FOR KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS**

An introductory letter was sent in advance of our trained interviewer calls. The letter (see appendix) was sent to 17 potential key informants with the goal of obtaining 12 completed interviews - two completed interviews per topical area: employment, familiarity with federal and state benefits, housing, education and training, health care services, and disability and rehabilitation services. This letter and the interview questions both contain text that introduce the overall study, explain to the key informants that their participation is voluntary and they could withdraw at any time. One week after sending the introductory letter, a trained ISER interviewer started calling the identified respondents. The project was explained and the potential respondent asked to participate in an interview. Consent was obtained (see appendix for key informant consent short form, written summary, and procedures for obtaining consent) Interviews were digitally recorded for transcription. Data collection commenced on April 24, 2014, and concluded May 15, 2014. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Alaska Anchorage.

### **DESCRIPTION OF KEY INFORMANTS**

The Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) completed 12 key informant interviews with representatives of: Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Alaska Veterans Regional Office, Military Order of the Purple Heart, American Legion, Alaska Veterans Museum, and the University of Alaska. We spoke with key informants located in Anchorage and Fairbanks. These organizations have offices in these communities and additional locales such as Kenai, Wasilla, and Ketchikan. Organizations with multiple locations provide the same services in each community served. The representatives interviewed have worked with veterans at their respective organizations in these positions from 3.5 to 24 years.

### **ANALYSIS/FINDINGS**

This section of the report summarizes the findings from the key informant interviews.

### **How would a veteran learn about your services?**

- Veteran focused events
- Transition Assistance Program Services (TAPS) through the Air Force and Army Career Alumni Program (ACAP)
- Variety of additional methods

Respondents talked about several veteran focused events in the community that they organize and/or participate. Activities mentioned were: Stand Down events, homeless and mental health summits, veterans job fairs; and designated veteran outreach events which have occurred for example in Barrow, Dillingham and Juneau. Key informants collaborated with other organizations such as: Alaska Healing Hearts, Project Healing Waters, and Wounded Warriors Project to promote their services.

“...teaming up with the service organizations and veterans specified event in the community and you’re present, engaged and use those opportunities as moments to build those relationships as well.”

Transition Assistance Program Services (TAPS) through the Air Force and Army Career Alumni Program (ACAP) classes were mentioned by several respondents as transitional information courses provided to military members who are leaving the services in part to inform them of veteran benefits. A couple of respondents are regular presenters in these classes.

“...by policy, service members are required to participate in a block of courses, army calls it ACAP, and air force calls it TAPS ... supposed to be mandatory. That being said it’s specifically not mandatory. I regularly see troops who were waiting until the very last minute [or] had 30 days before they were ... discharged from the army before they were allowed to do any of those out processing classes.”

“Well for those out of service and in this area here it’s more or less word of mouth. If they are in the service they have what they call transition assistance briefings TAP, at Wainwright and Eielson and they do have the same thing in the Anchorage area at JBER....I think there’s a directive that they attend theses briefings. Whether or not the unit lets them do it or not, that’s beyond me.”

“Many of them when leaving the military are required to go through the TAP program so they are familiar with what services the Job Center provides, that there is a Vet Rep to help them, to make referrals, training, whatever they need. ...They tell everybody going through the TAP every month how to contact us. Many of our partners know about us through our networking. ... Word of mouth; veterans who I’ve helped in the past word of mouth... tell other friends and family members who are veterans. It kind of circulates.”

“Since 2007 we’ve kind of been putting the word out to transitioning points in the DOD, to JBER the family programs, the ACAP program; Wainwright the family programs, the ACAP program, Eielson the family programs, Greely the ACAP program, so we’ve put our name and number at the transition points for the active duty who are leaving the military here in Alaska. Then, there is a national website that anyone who is in the lower 48 who is coming here and needs point of contact, will find me listed as a point of contact for the Alaska VA.”

Additional methods used to inform veterans of services include: 800 numbers, radio advertisements, websites, advertise at job centers, outreach activities in corrections system and on the streets, Facebook, Twitter, and flyers.

“...We have relationships with the VAVR program, we have relationships with the schools, the universities, so pretty much a variety of, you know, doctor’s offices, a variety of ways that they have the ability to find out about us.”

“...there’s a national call center for homeless veterans. They can call a single 1-800 number whether it’s the veteran themselves, a family member of a veteran, or just a concerned person for a veteran . . . Even if somebody doesn’t know what services are available where they’re at, anywhere in the State of Alaska they can call that single 1-800 number and we will get back in touch with the veteran if at all possible.”

“The veterans know about our services when they come in the job center of course, if they go on the Alaska service exchange system (ALEXsys), through dealing with any of the veteran service officers out at the VA, with any veterans organizations in town such as VFW, DAV, AMVET any of those organization. Also there are flyers around town about hiring vets. We have career fairs.”

### **How do Alaska veterans obtain your services?**

Many of the key informants explained that the first thing a veteran has to do to obtain their veteran benefits is to enroll with the U.S. Veterans Administration (VA). This is an important key step in determining if the veteran is eligible for benefits, which benefits, and the quantity of a service they can obtain. From the descriptions provided this can be done quickly if the veteran has the correct documentation. Lacking documentation can generate lengthy delays in enrollment and access of benefits. To secure the VA card for health benefits or to prove eligibility for benefits to file a claim for other veterans benefits, several of the key informants shared descriptions of the documentation – a DD214 – Discharge Papers and Separation Documents which serves as their record of service and is key documentation to claim/apply for veterans benefits. Most if not all of the respondents provide education and counseling with this enrollment/eligibility process. Some provide a warm hand off to another organization or



individual to assist the veteran while others will spend hours, weeks, and months guiding and supporting the veteran through this process.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs only issues Veterans Identification Card (VIC) cards to veterans who are eligible for the VA health care and certain other situations.

“Many of the various State governments have stepped in and provided a logo on their Driver's and ID cards that will verify . . . veteran status. The logo won't be accepted as legal proof of eligibility for veteran's benefits, but just about any business that offers discounts will honor it.”<sup>27</sup> Alaska has recently started such a program.

“...somebody who has zero contact with VA. The first action that they would need to do is to become enrolled with the Alaska VA. They do this ... regardless of where they're at in Alaska. They can go online and download a form called a 1010EZ, complete it and within a few weeks they will get something back on their enrollment information as to whether or not they're qualified or not; or if they're here in Anchorage or at another place where there is a VA office, they can go right into the office and enroll, and find out if they're eligible. When they're eligible, they're also issued a veterans' ID card that they have so even if the person is not planning on using VA services, it's better for them to enroll for services that way they don't have that one barrier to cross when they need services because that's the starting point. We really cannot do very much at all with a veteran until we've identified that they are a veteran eligible for services and that's how that happens.”

“We do see vet's that are not service connect yet. Those are vets who have not gotten registered through the VA, who are not getting their health care through the VA. They don't have the VA ID card. So we get a lot of those too but part of our process of engaging with them is to help them get into the system at that point.”

“We would assist them to the process of getting connected to the VA. Usually that would involve, ... involve calling over to OEF-OIF interfacing with a transition advocate, letting them know service member so and so, veteran so and so will come over to see them, here's their contact information and they'll set up an appointment to come in and see that transition advisor who will walk them through the process of getting service connected. That's an administrative process. That has nothing to do with us providing care....”

“... if they don't have their discharge papers or medical records we assist them in requesting them via the internet or with certain forms to fill out and send them in.”

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<sup>27</sup> <http://nvf.org/veterans-benefits/getting-veteran-id-card> National Veterans Foundation, Getting a Veteran ID Card, accessed May 29, 2014.

**Are your services provided on a one time basis or are they on-going?**

**Is there a waiting list to access your services?**

**What may cause a delay in your providing services?**

Overall most of the service providers we spoke with either provide service on a walk in basis or set times for orientation for veterans which are followed up by an initial interview the same day. Based on the needs of the veteran the service can be provide in one visit or is provided over time until the service need is complete or the initial inquiry has been satisfied. For the most part we found no comments about the delays or wait times in the provision of service.

Delays or waits for the receipt of service were described as part of determining the eligibility of the veteran to receive what level of benefits. In the event of emergency (examples include a veteran seeking counseling in crisis or is homeless) the service is provided prior to the determination of eligibility/claim status for veteran benefits.

**What, if any, organizations provide similar services to veterans?**

Only one shared information about organizations that provide services to non-veteran focused population. Most of the respondents when asked about organizations that provide similar services provided information on other organizations reflected in the key informant group.

“There’s a host of organizations, some I would call more ancillary. I participate in a lot of employment type groups. I work with a lot of colleges,... There are some dog training groups that will help to provide veterans with service dogs. So there is a host of other services I have to engage with and establish relationships so that when my vet people need something from HUD or Social Security or State of Alaska Job Center... Looking at the State of Alaska there’s MOU’s in a lot of the bush communities. The Native Alaskan Health Care Corporations...”

“Here in [community] area we have Vietnam Veterans of America, and we have Disabled American Veterans....Vet Center...”

“Well, not knowing the other real [integral] workings of it, you have the VFW that’s there, you have the DAV – Disabled American Veterans, and MOPH, which is the Military Order of the Purple Heart, and AM Vets. Now exactly how far they go, I couldn’t tell you ... but I know that they have some programs available similar to ours.”

“...VA VR – Veterans Administration Voc Rehab....”

“The VA provides an area called Chapter 31. They have an employment coordinator”

“...The LVER [Local Veterans Employment Representative] allows for outreach and helping any veteran with whatever they needed and the DVOP [Disabled Veterans Outreach Program] was really restricted to only helping disabled veterans. They were not really allowed in their job description to do the outreach.”

“Can go to other places, such as, VA, veteran service organizations, vet centers, online resources.... A lot of different methods they can go about to get this information.”

“... The American Legion, VFW, [Military] Order of the Purple Heart, and Vietnam Veterans of America are some of the other organizations that do the same thing that we do. And while we get 60% of the claims their Service Officers are just as capable as us. We all do the same thing.”

### **How many Alaska veterans are typically served by your department, program, or service?**

Requests for reports and information on numbers and counts of services sought and provided were mostly met with a reply of the respondent being unable to provide that information. It appears that much of this information is provided to national offices where it is collated and provided in national reports. The three Alaska reports we were able to obtain were specific for the services provided rather than a cross section of veterans.

### **What is your description of the typical veteran seeking services?**

Representatives described the most common veterans seeking services as in their late twenties and earlier forties and mostly male. Other individuals have served in World War II (WWII), Korean War, Vietnam, 1<sup>st</sup> Gulf War (Persian Gulf), and most recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq (Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraq Freedom (OIF), and Operation New Dawn (OND).

Of the comments offered, respondents said their service population of younger veterans (those in the first and recent Gulf wars) tends to be interested in education, training, and looking for employment. Older vets were looking for information on change of careers. Many of these are Vietnam veterans who have been performing physical labor and construction are looking for new careers that are less strenuous. Older vets in their 50's and above are sometimes looking for supplemental income. Some through employment and others from veterans benefit programs.

This mix of veterans does vary by services offered by the organization and changes over time. One organization was seeing the opposite of what was just described with older veterans and fewer younger veterans which is directly tied to the services provided by the organization.

Respondents mentioned how the veterans by war have changed over the years as a decade ago there were more Vietnam veterans and now there is an increase with veterans from the most recent wars. There have always been more men seeking veteran benefits but women seeking services is increasing. This reflects the changes in the gender composition in the military services.

“New vets by those I mean the ones that are just currently getting out may be looking for wanting to go back to school, and want some assistance on trying to figure out what it is that they want to do. So they need that kind of service. Probably, individuals who have been veterans and have been our veterans but have been out of the service for a long time, they’re coming to us after numbers of years on you know maybe they got out of the service, got into a career and now they can’t do career, and they’re looking for something else.”

“We are seeing more and more of the Vietnam era veteran. Veterans who are getting old enough now, they can no longer do physical labor like heavy lifting and construction. They are seeking retraining to go into different career fields. Most of the one’s I see are between the ages of 27 and 40. That falls right in line with the OEF/OIF, Desert Storm and post Desert Storm conflict.”

“There are a lot more males then females in the military and up until recently only males could go into a combat line unit....”

“I’m seeing quite a few older vets who just need to supplement their income, in their 50s and 60s and even some in their 70s, from Vietnam. . . . Had an older guy +80 years old who needed to get a part time job so it was kind of interesting but mostly the younger guys between . . . early 20[s] to early 40s.”

### **What is/are most common/frequently requested service(s)?**

The most frequently requested service was usually related to the specific service provided by the organization.

“I would say behavioral health.”

“Access to primary care.”

“It’s the educational pieces.”

“Questions regarding navigating the college system.”

"I would say uh, I mean, we really only provide one service. . . . Here it's coaching and answering questions. So, that's usually it. The questions they normally ask are pretty much well when am I going to get my money? So we do a lot of just education, education and coaching I suppose."

"Housing."

"The most commonly requested and because we have the resources, the most frequently provided service is housing through VA supported housing to chronically homeless...."

"For the veterans? Usually, employment, employment opportunities."

"Next would be our vocational services."

"I would say it's a tie between help me with my resume and how do I go about applying for a job and get a call for an interview."

The most common frequently requested service across the organizations was help with filing a VA claim or obtaining benefits.

"...Veterans who come in here typically are not aware of the full scope of their benefits ... A lot of them believe they are not eligible for services ... "

"...it's filing for disabilities."

"Navigate the VA bureaucracy [how to figure out how to get your benefits and filing it appropriately so it's not kicked out of the system.]"

"Probably VA benefits."

"They go through us as an advocate to them with the paper work, and buck the system when the VA says no, and we go in and say why and show them all the records. "

"...followed closely by how do I start a disability claim."

"...Basic questions. And questions regarding the use of VA benefits."

**What do you think are the unmet needs of Alaska Veterans?**

When asked about unmet needs of Alaska veterans, the respondents gave a variety of responses. Housing and employment issues had more comments than the other categories but numbers were not exceptional. Their comments have been grouped in the following topic areas:

- Housing
- Employment
- Services for veterans living in rural parts of Alaska
- Supportive services for family members of veterans
- Cemetery
- Travel for health care
- Medical Services
- Information on Available Benefits and Services
- Assistance with claims and enrollment

## **Housing**

“Well homelessness, you know, keeps popping up all the time.”

“Affordable housing number one.”

“Affordable housing when they first get out of the service. A lot of veterans have been living on base for years and they get out and find out they have a \$1500 to \$2000 house payment or rent and they’ve never had to pay rent in their life....”

“...housing... we’re having a lack of housing for homeless vets. ...[Respondent shared a story about vets living in their cars]....They do their best but veterans have to wait weeks for adequate housing until they can establish themselves and get on their feet they are homeless. Many of them don’t want to talk about it....”

“Housing – affordable housing. ”

## **Employment**

“...the next one I’d be looking at is realistic employment opportunities. If in Anchorage . . . to afford a two bedroom apartment it cost the equivalent of making over 21 dollars an hour and jobs, most of the entry level jobs in Anchorage are starting off at 7.75 to 8 dollars an hour, there’s a big deficit there or a lot of hours people have to work.”

“[The veterans] bring a tremendous amount but that information has got to be available to the working communities so they are opening their doors to the veteran and not being afraid of what the media tells them. That is the most critical.... the understanding

that if a person comes on board with a disability of some sort and they need to reasonable accommodations there are avenues from both Voc Rehab and both the State and the Federal side of the house provide the equipment with no charge to the employer if necessary....”

“Since Alaska has more veterans per capita the reduction in Vet Reps would need to go back up or would have to be replaced with a few more Vet Reps considering the time we’re in and all the returning veterans coming back.... It’s imperative that we have funding for at least one to two more in [location] alone....More resources in our vet service area. ...need more computer resources that are designated just for veterans...”

“More transferring of military skills into actual civilian jobs and education....actually counting credits, military credits, towards degree programs, they will transfer them all in but they don’t actually count towards the actual degree programs that they’re looking for so just more ways of giving veterans credit for the service that they have done.”

### **Services for veterans living in rural parts of Alaska**

“...the veterans [who] are out in the villages and off the road system. By then partnering with the Indian health service they have got this covered....”

“The second thing is getting the rural;... VA has made attempts. They’ve got travel representatives, they have toll free numbers, and they can call us if they have any questions.”

### **Supportive services for family members of veterans and case management**

“If we have young people coming back and their families simply cannot take care of them what happens to them? And I’m worried about that. I don’t know how big that need is though because sure you can take a look at somebody and say well now they are a quadriplegic or now they’ve lost an arm and a leg and taking care of them is different than taking care of somebody who has had a traumatic brain injury.”

“Case management, and the case management of poly-trauma and TBI [traumatic brain injury] veterans.”

### **Cemetery**

“A cemetery in Fairbanks, State or National...”

### **Travel for health care**

“... transportation because if they have a problem... trying to get from there to a place such as Anchorage so that they can get services or go to the hospital. . . ”

“Affordable travel to healthcare....Well, if you’re not a travel eligible veteran, then that travel may cost more than paying the medical care for yourself....”

### **Medical services**

“Medical services. Just from personal experience. The frustrations that they have to deal with when they deal with the VA. I know a number of veterans who refuse to go there....”

“More accessible health care.”

### **Information on available benefits and services**

“I think a lot of veterans and disabled veterans are just not aware of all the different services that are available to them from employment programs, housing programs, medical programs, you name it. The conglomerate of everything....I think there’s just not a lot of education about what there is available out there.”

“[medical benefits] they don’t know how easy it is. They were never really informed or never asked.”

### **Assistance with claims and enrollment**

“The biggest need with the VA system is the time it takes to do a claim. The veteran’s dependency claims, that’s an issues. A regular claim, it takes 60 – 90 days to do the claim.”

“The other one being the, again, the services that they get from VA.”

### **Which vets are being missed?**

As we asked the question of which groups of veterans are being missed we soon learned that the wording of this question though reviewed and pre-tested did not obtaining the desired response. Using the word missed could place the interviewee on the defensive, as if they were not performing their job. We figured out after a time that a better question would have been to ask about veterans that have not been seen. Here the responses were very different by respondent. Some said older veterans, those in transit between leaving the military and



enrolling for veterans benefits, those who are not eligible due to the way they separated from the military, those not seeking benefits because they think they are not eligible, veterans in rural parts of Alaska, and those veterans experiencing alcohol abuse.

“I think probably the first Gulf War vets. It seems like it’s a harder body of veterans to reach out to and identify and get them into care. A lot of them are; it’s an interesting generation because so many of those vets might be both Vietnam and Gulf War. Or so many of our new vets now are Gulf War and OEF –OIF. So some vets fall into an age range generation category that’s closer to the Vietnam era and some of them fall into the age range and generation that’s closer to the OEF-OIF. ”

“...I think that the older Veterans.”

“ most of your older veterans, if they don’t know if there are veterans services available it’s just that all their life they haven’t needed it, didn’t want it, and they don’t trust it.”

“... there’s a lot of veterans that don’t seek it. ....Well, I’m not showing up because I don’t need any, and a lot of the other ones they don’t need any they don’t want any. And they don’t want to put up with the bureaucracy of the government.”

“Probably the vets that may be in transit. You know, they’re not - maybe don’t have stable living arrangements yet. Where you know they’re not really ready to go to work because they just don’t have a place to live. ...ones that aren’t medically stable. You know, they’re still dealing with a lot of either PTSD issues, or depression issues, or alcohol issues, or you know – but once I again I wouldn’t pull that out and say that’s only vets, that’s a lot of people....”

“...the ones who are alcoholics. There is a homeless population ... WWII guys are not coming in. The Korean War veterans are not coming in.”

“I think that veterans that get missed are the ones who are chaptered out of the military, and are not given access to the ACAP or family programs – the mandatory separation briefings. ...They’re being administratively kicked out of the military.”

“A lot of the people in the rural areas.”

It seems to be a prevalent idea that veterans must self-identify, so if they’re not seeking benefits, the programs don’t know about them and can’t reach out to them.

“...if they’re not using their benefits we don’t know about them. So if they’re not using their benefits, then we just have to rely on them trying to seek us out, but if they are using their benefits, we can try to reach them.”

“Those veterans who are not seeking services are those who have figured out the system, you know, and maybe have master’s degrees or have just figured it out. This is a needs based program, so once they have the experience, they don’t have a need. Also veterans that are disabled but don’t know they are...”

“...Some are not aware of the benefits they are entitled to. A lot of them are in the rural area and you know how Alaska is, it’s rural and in the villages and stuff and they just never get around to doing it and they don’t trust the government....”

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<sup>i</sup> [http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits\\_book.asp](http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book.asp) accessed January 16 2014